



Joint  
Advanced  
Warfighting  
Program

INSTITUTE FOR DEFENSE ANALYSES

**Al Sahawa—The Awakening  
Volume III-A: Al Anbar Province,  
Western Euphrates River Valley, Area of  
Operations Denver—Al Qaim**

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## Executive Summary

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The purpose of the Anbar Awakening project, and the five volumes that document its findings, is to tell the story of Al Anbar's *Sahawa*.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, it will show that there were a number of developments throughout Al Anbar between 2003 and 2008 that significantly contribute to the overall Awakening story. This is contrary to the popular belief that the Awakening movement started in Ramadi in 2006 and that the movement was not connected to previous events in Al Anbar. As such, this document, Volume III-A, addresses events in the Al Qaim District of the Coalition's Area of Operations (AO) Denver (see map in Appendix D).

Anbar Province's Al Qaim district became increasingly important to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) after November 2004 when it lost its sanctuary to the Coalition forces' onslaught in the second battle of Fallujah, Operation AL FAJR. The Al Qaim district is located on Iraq's border with Syria. Although the district's population of 150,000–200,000 represents only 10 percent of the Anbar population, the area is strategically important due to its location on the Iraqi border and along the Euphrates River.<sup>2</sup> Al Qaim was a historic and lucrative smuggling route for black market goods, and became AQI's lifeline to Baghdad as foreign fighters, money, and other resources that fueled the insurgency infiltrated Iraq. With the loss of Fallujah, Al Qaim also became AQI's newfound sanctuary, its proclaimed Caliphate.

AQI arrived with offers of partnering with Al Qaim's tribes in a bid to defeat the Coalition, promising money and other resources.<sup>3</sup> As Muslims and Arabs, AQI members said it was the obligation of Al Qaim's tribes to conduct *Jihad*, to fight the crusaders. After all, the Coalition, ignorant of tribal customs, religion, and traditions, had disrespected and dishonored the people of Al Qaim, and a patriotic resistance had already formed there. The tribes of Al Qaim saw the Al Qaeda movement as the "complete *Jihad*."<sup>4</sup> It was time to rid the area of the occupiers, according to AQI, and together, they—AQI, the tribes, and their militias—could do that.

But AQI's offer was deceptive; this was not a partnership. AQI provided weaponry and funding, but they also demanded to lead the *Jihad* with the intent of first destroying and then

<sup>1</sup> *Sahawa* means Awakening in Arabic.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel Dale Alford, briefing on 3/6 Marines in Al Qaim Iraq, August 2005 to March 2006, Institute for Defense Analyses, 16 February 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Some have asked, *When did AQI arrive in Al Qaim?* Foreign fighters had been infiltrating Iraq though Al Qaim since the war began in March 2003; however, Zarqawi's organization didn't become AQI until he pledged to support Osama bin Laden in September 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Sheikh Kurdi Rafee Farhan al-Mahalawi, interview, Dr. William Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, USMC, and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, Kurdi's guesthouse, Ubaidi, Iraq, 17 April 2010.

transforming the social fabric of Al Qaim. AQI started by taking over the smuggling routes, skimming profits and killing those who resisted. They then imposed a radical form of *Sharia* on the community with fanatical punishments for transgressors. Religion was used to justify AQI's actions, which included forced marriages to the local women. The most common AQI intimidation tactic was to behead those who resisted and leave the body with the head on its chest in the street for all to see—sometimes only the head was left and the body disposed of in the river or the *Jazeera*, the desert.

On 2 May 2005, Major Ahmed Adiya Asaf, the newly appointed Chief of Police for Al Qaim was walking Main Street in the market area of Husaybah when seven men attacked, shot, and beheaded him. AQI was reinforcing its declaration from an earlier meeting with the local tribal leadership. Namely that it, and not the tribes of Al Qaim, would be in charge of security—AQI would not tolerate competition of any sort.

The beheading of Major Ahmed was the last straw. The Albu-Mahal was the first tribe to turn against AQI. Some would say the *Sahawa* began that day, 2 May 2005.<sup>5</sup>

During the next year, the Albu-Mahal would partner with the Coalition and Iraqi government to purge AQI from Al Qaim. The purpose of this paper is to tell the story of Al Qaim's *sahawa*—the evolution of a community from AQI supporter to AQI opponent. In doing so, it will show that Al Qaim was one of the first places in Iraq where Coalition forces utilized effective counter-insurgency practices.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the paper shows how Al Qaim's revolt against AQI was part of a continuous storyline, explicitly connected to events in Ramadi, and one of the critical enablers of the Anbar Awakening movement.<sup>7</sup>

## Objective

The objective of the Anbar Awakening project is to create an unclassified, credible resource for trainers and educators to use to examine and learn from the Awakening movement. It is presented in multimedia to accommodate different teaching and learning styles.<sup>8</sup> The project presents the Awakening movement's phases from the insurgency's development in 2003 to the Coalition's transfer of responsibility for Al Anbar to the Iraqis in 2008; it offers analysis and lessons, many of which are transferrable to current and future conflicts.

<sup>5</sup> Colonel Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf, former Commander, Desert Protectors, interview with Dr. William Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, USMC, and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, Husaybah, Iraq, 18 April 2010. Colonel Gary W. Montgomery and CWO4 Timothy S. McWilliams, "Al Anbar Awakening," Volume II, *Iraqi Perspectives* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009), p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> The COIN practices used in Al Qaim and several other Iraqi cities as early as September 2005 were some of the same practices later codified and institutionalized by the publication of FM 3-24 in December 2006.

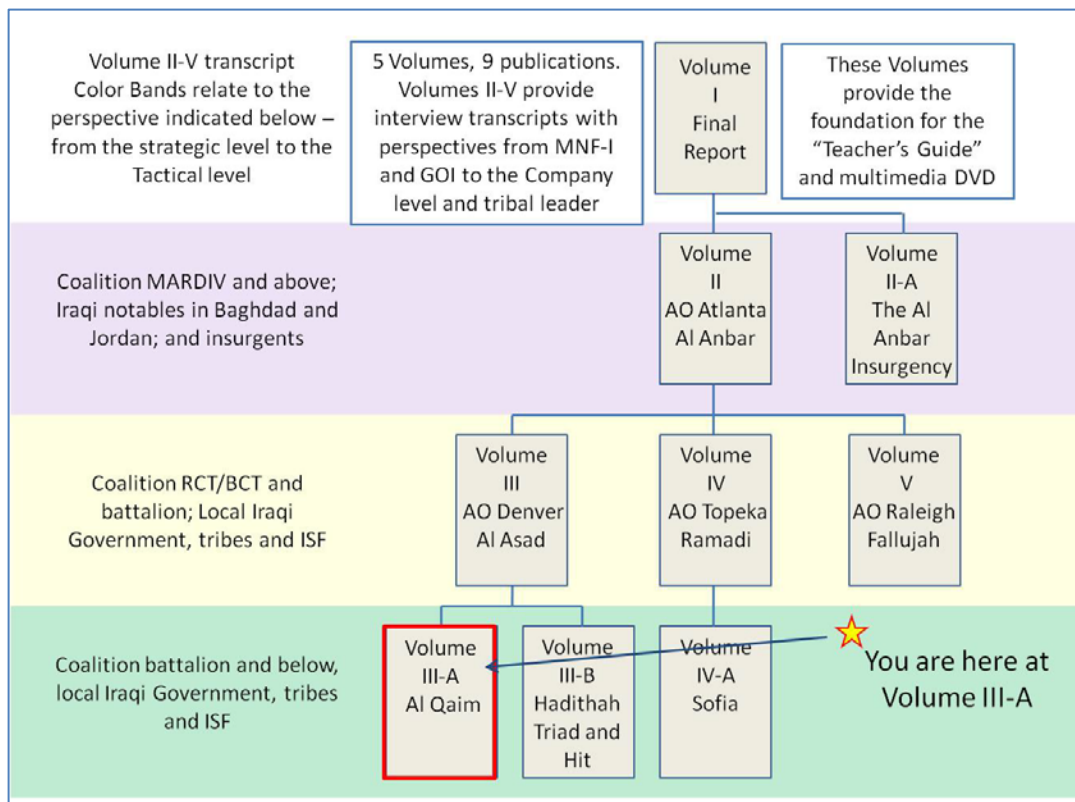
<sup>7</sup> *Sahawa* or Awakening with an upper case A refers to the overall movement. The term *sahawa*, or awakening with a lower case a refers to individual movements in specific areas such as Al Qaim or Ramadi.

<sup>8</sup> PME institutes have asked for unclassified, public releasable material to be used in their seminars.

## Reconstruction

Reconstructing the events in Al Anbar into a multimedia product begins where most case studies, historical analyses, and comparable projects end. The case study has to be completed first; next (or simultaneously, if possible), multimedia materials need to be collected; and then those materials have to be woven together to bring the case study to life. Much of the information came through interviews. Chapter 2 of this document summarizes the transcripts of those interviews contained in the Appendices. That summary and those of the other volumes provide the script—the storyboard—with quotes that identify potential “characters” and video or audio clips for the multimedia product.

The Awakening project comprises five volumes of supporting documents and an interactive DVD with a Teacher’s Guide. The purpose of the Teacher’s Guide is to suggest how an instructor might use the DVD and the various volumes to support and inform research and role playing. It provides storyline experiences that may be relevant to on-going conflicts, examples that allow students to see the strategic implications of tactical actions or visa versa, and so on. Volume I is the final report and Volumes II–V, arranged by AOs, from strategic to tactical levels, contain background on each AO, transcripts from interviewees who worked in those AOs, and summaries of those transcripts (see Figure).



**Areas of operation in Al Anbar provide the structure for the Awakening volumes**

## This Volume

This volume begins with a description of the Awakening project. It summarizes the events that most people attribute as the basis for the Awakening movement: Sheikh Abdul Sattar Albu-Risha's coining of the term *Awakening*, or *Sahawa* in Arabic, and his meeting with the Coalition in September 2006 in Ramadi. Chapter 1 presents the project's objective, the collection strategy, lists the volumes produced as part of the project and, lastly, shows where this volume fits into the overall Anbar Awakening Project. Chapter 2 provides the Al Qaim storyline—the region's evolution from AQI supporter to AQI opponent—its decision to join the Coalition and Government of Iraq in fighting AQI, and the impact those events had on the Anbar Awakening movement. Significant themes and lessons from this volume include:

1. As mentioned above, Al Qaim district was important to AQI and the Coalition because of its location on the Iraqi border and along the Euphrates River.<sup>9</sup> Al Qaim is a lucrative smuggling route, and was AQI's lifeline to Baghdad as resources that fueled the insurgency infiltrated Iraq. With the loss of Fallujah in 2004, Al Qaim also became AQI's new sanctuary.
2. The first significant turning of a tribe against AQI occurred in Al Qaim when the Albu-Mahal turning on AQI and its Iraqi supporters.
3. In addition to turning on AQI, this was the first partnering of a tribe, the Albu-Mahal, with the Coalition and Government of Iraq, to fight AQI.
4. Al Qaim's revolt against AQI was part of a continuous storyline, connected to events in Ramadi, and one of the critical enablers of the Anbar Awakening movement.

Most accounts of the Awakening begin with Sheikh Sattar's *Sahawa* movement in Ramadi, September 2006–07. Although some acknowledge the Albu-Mahal tribe's actions in Al Qaim during 2005–06 as the first tribal uprising against Al Qaeda, they characterize the two movements—in Al Qaim and Ramadi—as isolated and unrelated.<sup>10</sup> In the Coalition's eyes, it might seem that the two events were disconnected, but to many Iraqis, there was a strong connection through tribal communications, coordination, and affiliation, in particular among three of the tribes: Albu-Mahal, Albu-Nimr, and Albu-Risha. This volume provides the foundation for that hypothesis.

<sup>9</sup> Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Individuals with this commonly held perspective, include, for example, James Soriano, Department of State, Provincial Reconstruction Team Leader in Iraq 2006–09 (*Al-Anbar Awakening Volume One: U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009*, 2009).

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# 1. The Awakening<sup>11</sup>

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At a 14 September 2006 meeting in Ramadi, three days after a classified report was leaked to the *Washington Post* announcing Al Anbar as “militarily unwinnable,” Sheikh Abdul Sattar Albu-Risha announced the Awakening—the *Sahawa*.<sup>12</sup> At that meeting, Sattar, along with 40 other sheikhs from the Ramadi area, signed an Emergency Council proclamation to work with the Coalition to drive Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) from Al Anbar. By December 2006, 18 of the 21 Ramadi-area tribes had joined this Awakening movement.<sup>13</sup> By February 2007, the movement began to accelerate throughout Al Anbar as the Coalition reinforced areas seeking help to defeat Al Qaeda. On 3 September 2007, one year after Sattar’s announcement, President George W. Bush met with the tribal leaders of Al Anbar and the leadership of Iraq to congratulate them on their successes.<sup>14</sup> Sattar was assassinated ten days later, but the Awakening could not be stopped or stalled. On 1 September 2008, conditions were stable enough to hand over the province to the Iraqis.

What happened? How could Al Anbar—the cradle of the Sunni insurgency and the birthplace of AQI—turn around so quickly?

## A. Objective

The objective of the Awakening project is to provide an unclassified, thought provoking, credible, accurate resource for trainers and educators to use to examine and learn from the Awakening movement. The project presents the movement’s phases from the insurgency’s development in 2003 to the Coalition’s transfer of responsibility for Al Anbar to the Iraqis in 2008, and offers analysis and lessons, many of which are transferrable to current and future conflicts.<sup>15</sup> The ultimate product is a multimedia instructional package to accommodate different teaching and learning styles.

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<sup>11</sup> The Awakening movement was the Al Anbar Awakening until 2007 when two things occurred: Sheikh Sattar changed the Al Anbar Al Sahawas (AAS) to the Al Sahawa Al Iraqi (SAI), and the movement was implemented in other areas of Iraq outside of Al Anbar.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, “Situation Called Dire in West Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 11 September 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Ramadi is a city and district—in this case, those sheikhs came from both the city and the district. Anthony Deane, Colonel, USA, “Providing Security Force Assistance in an Economy of Force Battle,” *Military Review* (Jan–Feb 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Alissa J. Rubin, “Sunni Sheikh Who Backed US in Iraq Killed,” *New York Times*, 14 September 2007, <[www.nytimes.com/2007/09/14/world/middleeast/14iraq.html?pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/14/world/middleeast/14iraq.html?pagewanted=print)>.

<sup>15</sup> The Coalition did not include the Iraqis, and the Coalition Forces did not include Iraqi Security Forces.

## B. Collection

Interviews were conducted in the United States, Iraq, and Jordan, and were structured around a series of five primary research questions (PRQs). Those questions were supplemented with secondary research questions (SRQs) that provided more granularity to the research. The SRQs, when answered, addressed the breadth and depth of the project and kept it focused on the objective. None of the research questions were necessarily static; they changed as they were answered and new leads developed. Interview plans based on those questions were tailored to each interviewee. Although the collection plan was more detailed and complex, the initial PRQs and SRQs are in Table 1-1.

**Table 1-1. Initial Primary and Secondary Research Questions for the Awakening Project**

<b>Primary Research Questions</b>	<b>Secondary Research Questions</b>
1. How, when, and why did the insurgency start?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who participated and why did they join?</li><li>• How were they supported within Iraq and/or by other countries?</li></ul>
2. What was the Al Anbar Awakening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there a single definition? If so, what is it and if not, what are the other definitions? Do different groups define it differently?</li><li>• What are the various perspectives—Coalition, Iraqi, Insurgent, others?</li><li>• Was there more than one Awakening?</li></ul>
3. What caused the Al Anbar Awakening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What events set the conditions for the Awakening?</li><li>• Who and what caused those events—Coalition, Al Qaeda in Iraq, insurgents, Iraqis (residents, tribes), the Government of Iraq, Iraqi Security Forces, and others?</li><li>• Was there a “tipping point?” If so, when, where, how did it start, and how did it evolve?</li></ul>
4. How did the Al Anbar Awakening reconcile the causes identified by PRQ 3? Who and what events contributed to the reconciliation?	No SRQs
5. What were the major themes of and lessons from the Al Anbar Awakening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Did these themes and lessons contribute to success in the larger context of Iraq?</li><li>• Are they transferable to other areas such as Afghanistan or Africa?</li><li>• Should they be incorporated into doctrine?</li><li>• Should they be taught at the various Professional Military Education institutions? If so, how?</li></ul>

## C. Publication Series and Structure

Creating a provocative, credible, accurate resource for trainers and educators to examine the Awakening using multimedia is more difficult than it may sound. Constructing all of the material gathered during the interviews into a multimedia product begins where most case studies, historical analyses, and comparable projects, end: First, you have to complete the case study; next (or



simultaneously, if possible), you have to collect the multimedia materials; and then you can finally weave those materials together to bring that case study to life.

That being the case, this volume is part of a multi-volume set comprising interview transcripts and a final study report.

## **1. The Volumes**

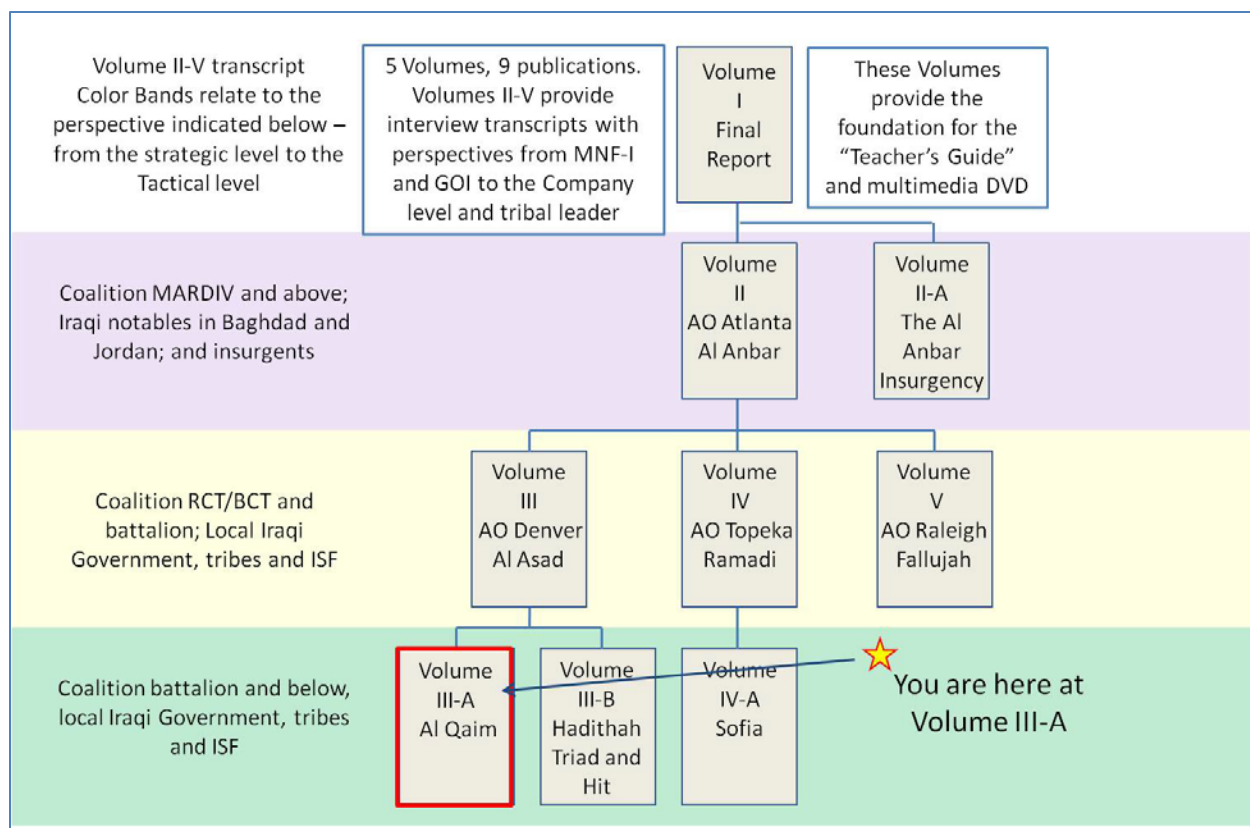
The Al Anbar Awakening product consists of five volumes of reference material, comprising nine publications, plus a Teacher's Guide with an interactive, multimedia DVD. Volume I is the final report containing a storyline that follows the organization of the DVD. Volumes II–V contains the interview transcripts organized according to Coalition areas of operation (AOs). (See Figure 1-1; also, a map of the various AOs is in Appendix D.)

The volumes are organized as follows:

- Volume I. Al Anbar Awakening—Final Report
- Volume II. Al Anbar Awakening: AO Atlanta, An Overview
- Volume III. Al Anbar Awakening: AO Denver, Western Euphrates
- Volume IV. Al Anbar Awakening: AO Topeka, Ramadi Area
- Volume V. Al Anbar Awakening: AO Raleigh, Fallujah Area

These volumes tell the in-depth Awakening story and feature all of the interview transcripts from which the storyline was constructed. As an example, Volume II covers AO Atlanta, which is approximately all of Al Anbar province. Volumes III–V cover the AOs subordinate to AO Atlanta and districts subordinate to Al Anbar.

Additionally, Volumes II–V all begin with the same introduction, PRQs, and structure to orient readers within the project and storyline, regardless of which volume they read first.



**Figure 1-1. Areas of operation in Al Anbar provide the structure for the Awakening volumes**

## 2. This Volume

Volume III-A presents Coalition and Iraqi perspectives on events in the district of Al Qaim in Al Anbar Province. Table 1-2 provides the list of Coalition and Iraqi interviewees for this publication. Their interview transcripts are in Appendices A and B.

Chapter 2 provides the storyline of events, responds to the research questions posed in the collection plan, and provides themes and lessons relevant to the Anbar Awakening.

Appendices include:

- A—Transcripts: Coalition Perspectives
- B—Transcripts: Iraqi Perspectives
- C—Who’s Who. Name spellings and descriptions of Iraqis who appear in the document. The description includes the person’s position, tribal affiliation, and some background information.
- D—Maps. Map showing areas discussed during the interviews.
- E—Illustrations
- F—References
- G—Abbreviations

**Table 1-2. Transcripts appearing in Volume III-A<sup>17</sup>**

#	Interviewee	Position in Iraq	Interview Date
Appendix A: Coalition Transcripts			
1	Col Timothy Mundy	Cdr, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Marine Regiment (3/2 Marines), Mar—Sep 2005	14 Jan 2011
2	Maj Frank Diorio	Cdr, India Company, 3/2 Marines, Mar—Sep 2011	8 Feb 2011
3	Col Dale Alford	Cdr, 3/6 Marines, Aug 2005—Apr 2006	16 Feb 2010
4	Maj Brendan Heatherman	Cdr, Kilo Company, 3/6 Marines, Aug 2005—Apr 2006	24 Feb 2010
5	Maj Rich Pitchford	Cdr, Lima Company, 3/6 Marines, Aug 2005—Apr 2006	22 Mar 2010
6	CPT Jim Calvert	Cdr, Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 582, Sep 2005—Jan 2006	26 Nov 2010
7	Col Nick Marano	Cdr, 1/7 Marines, Mar—Sep 2006	9 Feb 2011
Appendix B: Iraqi Transcripts			
8	Sheikh Sabah	Principal Sheikh, Albu-Mahal	3 Feb 2011
9	Sheikh Kurdi	Albu-Mahal Tribe	17 Apr 2010
10	Mayor Farhan	Mayor of Al Qaim District, Dec 2005 - present	17 Apr 2010
11	Colonel Ahmad	Former Desert Protector	18 Apr 2010
12	Staff Brigadier General Ismael	Cdr, 28 <sup>th</sup> Bde, 7 <sup>th</sup> Iraqi Division, Dec 2005—Mar 2008	15 Apr 2010
13	Major Mukhlis	Former Desert Protector	18 Apr 2010

<sup>17</sup> Coalition ranks are at the time of the interview; Coalition command positions and timeframes are in Iraq.



## 2. *Al-Sahawa: An Awakening*

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*The sun of freedom shines from the West.*

—Sheikh Kurdi, Albu-Mahal tribe<sup>18</sup>

Anbar Province's Al Qaim district became increasingly important to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's AQI after November 2004 when the group lost its sanctuary to the Coalition forces' onslaught in the second battle of Fallujah, Operation AL FAJR. The Al Qaim district is located on Iraq's border with Syria. Although the district's population of 150,000–200,000 represents only 10 percent of the Anbar population, the area holds strategic importance due to its location on the Iraqi border and along the Euphrates River.<sup>19</sup> Al Qaim is an historic and lucrative smuggling route for black market goods. It was AQI's lifeline to Baghdad as foreign fighters, money, and other resources that fueled the insurgency infiltrated Iraq. With the loss of Fallujah, Al Qaim also became AQI's newfound sanctuary, its proclaimed Caliphate.

AQI arrived with offers of partnering with Al Qaim's tribes in a bid to defeat the Coalition; they promised money and other resources. As Muslims and Arabs, AQI members said it was the obligation of the Al Qaim tribes to conduct *Jihad*, to fight the crusaders. After all, the Coalition, ignorant of tribal customs, religion, and traditions had disrespected and dishonored the people of Al Qaim, and a patriotic resistance had already formed there. Initially, the tribes of Al Qaim saw the Al Qaeda movement as the "complete *Jihad*."<sup>20</sup> For many residents, it was time to rid the area of the occupiers. They believed that together, they—AQI, the tribes, and their militias—could do that.

The tribes of the region varied in size and available resources and could not defeat the US occupiers on their own. Some, like the Albu-Mahal tribe, the strongest tribe in the area, organized and resourced the Hamza Battalion specifically to fight the Coalition.<sup>21</sup> However, even with the support of other tribal militias, the Albu-Mahal lacked the weaponry, ammu-

<sup>18</sup> Sheikh Kurdi Rafee Farhan al-Mahalawi, interview, Dr. William Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, USMC, and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, Kurdi's guesthouse, Ubaydi, Iraq, 17 April 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Colonel Dale Alford, briefing on 3/6 Marines in Al Qaim Iraq, August 2005 to March 2006, Institute for Defense Analyses, 16 February 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.

<sup>21</sup> "And that's a fact!" exclaimed Sheikh Kurdi, the on-the-ground leader of the Albu-Mahal tribe after Sheikh Sabah, the paramount sheikh of the Albu-Mahal tribe, fled to Jordan. Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.

munition, and other equipment to win such a fight. This limitation, more than any other, made AQI's offer of support tempting. Most of the tribes accepted.

But AQI's offer was deceptive; it was not a partnership. AQI provided weaponry and funding, but they also demanded to lead the *Jihad* with the intent of first destroying and then transforming the social fabric of Al Qaim. They started by taking over the smuggling routes, skimming profits, and killing those who resisted. They then imposed a radical form of Islamic Law or *Sharia* on the community with fanatical punishments for transgressors. AQI used religion to justify its actions, which included forced marriages between foreign fighters and local women.<sup>22</sup> The most common intimidation tactic was to behead those who resisted and leave the body with the head on its chest in the street for all to see—sometimes only the head was left and the body disposed of in the river or the *Jazeera*—the desert. Despite the risk of brutal retribution, there were dissenters among the tribes, particularly within Albu-Mahal in Husaybah, the small Iraqi border town that served as Al Qaim's main market, and the port of entry.

AQI needed to show it was in charge; it could not afford dissenters or challengers. The most visible challenge to their authority was the Coalition's Camp Gannon, located in the northwest corner of Husaybah.<sup>23</sup>

## A. The Attack on Camp Gannon

*This is going to be a great attack against the Americans. This will be a victory for Allah. This will be a victory against the coalition, and this will be a victory in which we free Iraq from the American oppressors.*<sup>24</sup>

Camp Gannon, constructed adjacent to the old border station between Syria and Iraq, became a reviled icon of the occupation. AQI needed a victory against such an icon for psychological as well as practical reasons. First, AQI needed to show the tribes of the area it was in charge of the region and Camp Gannon was a constant reminder of the Coalition's permanent presence. Second, although Camp Gannon's reach along the border was limited, it severely restricted the insurgents' ability to move foreign fighters and other support into

<sup>22</sup> *Forced* was a descriptor used by many Americans to describe marriages of foreign fighters to local women. However, most of Iraqis interviewed by the JAWP team in the Al Qaim area did not agree with the word "forced." Sheikh Kurdi explained that since the foreign fighters were there on a jihad, that they could not simply take a woman because religiously that would be improper, so they "arranged" these marriages. However, these marriages were not always without some sort of intimidation.

<sup>23</sup> Camp Gannon was named for Major Richard Gannon, Commanding Officer, Lima Company, 3/7 Marines. Major Gannon was awarded the Silver Star for his actions on 17 April 2004 while attempting to save members of his company. He was killed in action.

<sup>24</sup> Major Frank Diorio, USMC, interview with Major General Tom Jones, USMC, Retired, at Camp Pendleton, CA, 8 February 2011. According to Diorio this was roughly the translation of the insurgent video posted on the web on 12 April 2005 with a title, Al Qaeda Suicide Car Bomb Attack by "Abu Shaheed the Lebanese" and misdated April 18, 2005.

Iraq. Finally, as Camp Gannon restricted the flow of goods and resources from Syria, it accounted for a loss of monthly revenue to the insurgents.

Early morning on 11 April 2005, the enemy greeted Camp Gannon with two rounds of mortar fire. This was normal. India Company, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines (3/2) had been receiving a daily fare of mortar rounds at Camp Gannon since they arrived in February as did their predecessor, Baker Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines (1/7). What was not normal was the sophistication of the follow-on attack—a trademark of AQI.<sup>26</sup>

Three suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs) preceded by a breaching vehicle and followed by a film crew/media van penetrated Gannon's defensive barriers and targeted its inner sanctum—the command post (CP). Captain Frank Diorio, Company Commander, India Company, knocked down by successive blasts, recalled hearing someone yell, "Fire truck!" The fire truck was the last and largest of the three SVBIEDs.<sup>27</sup> "My heart sank, I heard the explosion. I thought it was a direct hit on my CP....I thought I'd lost about 150 Marines." (See Figure 2-1 for sequence of bombing.) Immediately after the last blast, Capt Diorio heard incoming fire—small arms, rocket propelled grenades, and machine gun—from houses adjacent to Gannon. Foreign fighters had infiltrated the area the night before, vacated the residents, and staged for the assault and exploitation of the attack. As the dust of the SVBIEDs settled, Capt Diorio heard outgoing fire and saw lieutenants and non-commissioned officers moving to positions and supplying Marines at their posts. Miraculously, as each platoon accounted for its Marines, Diorio realized that no Marines were lost.



**Figure 2-1. SVBIED  
Camp Gannon<sup>25</sup>**

<sup>25</sup> Insurgent video provided by Major Frank Diorio.

<sup>26</sup> Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.

<sup>27</sup> During his initial in-country briefings Major Diorio had heard of the Fire Truck. It was reportedly laden with explosives and embedded in a village near Al Asad. The Coalition did not dispose of it because of the collateral damage it could cause in the area. The truck, a high value resource to the insurgency, was whisked away by the insurgents to be used against a future high priority target. That target was Camp Gannon.

Within 24 hours of the attack, the insurgents posted the video announcing the attack as “a victory for Allah...a victory against the coalition...a victory in which we free Iraq from the American oppressors.”<sup>28</sup>

However, the townspeople quickly learned that the Coalition lost no forces. To save face, the foreign fighters announced over the mosque loud speakers that the “Americans didn’t die because you [the townspeople of Husaybah] are bad Muslims....or else we would have had victory.”<sup>29</sup>

The people of Husaybah didn’t buy the propaganda. One night soon after the 11 April attack, the Marines heard the sound of gunshots coming from the Market Place in Husaybah. They called a local trusted source known as the “East End Lady,” who resided at the east end of Husaybah, and asked, “What’s going on?” She replied, “Well, there was a fight in the Market Place between the foreign fighters and a local. The local is making fun of them for not killing any of you guys. And the foreign fighters shot and killed him.” This was Capt Diorio’s first indication that something was going on that the Marines might be able to influence. Capt Diorio explained, “There was no inclination that they liked us...but they were making fun of the foreign fighters... [so maybe it is something] we can use.”<sup>30</sup>

Although this may have been the Marines’ first sense of a rift between the tribes and AQI, trouble had been building for months. To protect their equities and control the population, AQI had not been allowing the tribes to arm and protect themselves. But security in Al Qaim, and Husaybah in particular, had become increasingly untenable. In response, the Albu-Mahal appointed one of their own, Major Ahmed Adiya Asaf, as the new Chief of Police.<sup>31</sup>

On 2 May 2005, MAJ Ahmed was walking Main Street in the market area of Husaybah when seven men attacked, shot, and beheaded him.<sup>32</sup> AQI was publically reinforcing the declaration it had made earlier to the tribal leadership that AQI, not the tribes of Al Qaim, would be in charge of security—AQI would not tolerate competition of any sort.

The beheading of MAJ Ahmed proved to be the last straw. The Albu-Mahal became the first tribe to openly revolt against AQI. Some would say the *Sahawa* began that day, 2 May 2005.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Ahmad interview, 18 April 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Ahmad interview, 18 April 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Ahmad interview, 18 April 2010. Also in Colonel Gary W. Montgomery and CWO4 Timothy S. McWilliams, “Al Anbar Awakening,” Volume II, *Iraqi Perspectives* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009), p. 141.



## B. Albu-Mahal Rejects Al Qaeda in Iraq

The change was swift. On the same day MAJ Ahmed was killed, Albu-Mahal's Hamza Battalion turned on AQI and AQI's local supporters, other tribes such as the Karbulis and Salmanis. The militia created to fight Coalition forces changed course and led the Albu-Mahals into their first major battle against foreign and local insurgents.<sup>34</sup>

The ferocity of AQI's reaction to Albu-Mahal's challenge—and the realization of the magnitude of the consequences should they fail—prompted Albu-Mahal members to call upon the Coalition for help. Former Governor of Al Anbar Province, Fasal al-Gaoud contacted Americans at Camp Fallujah on behalf of the Albu-Mahals.<sup>35</sup> Al-Gaoud was a member of the Albu-Nimr tribe, a tribe that shares ancestry as well as history with the Albu-Mahal tribe.<sup>36</sup> The Albu-Nimrs are the dominant tribe in Hit, a town northwest of Ramadi. In addition to Fasal's call for help, Albu-Mahal leadership called Bruska Nouri Shaways, Iraqi Deputy Minister of Defense, requesting the Coalition forces' support.<sup>37</sup> These early contacts were promising, but the potential would become lost in the chaos of what seemed to the Coalition to be a case of “red-on-red” struggle for power.

On 10 May, AQI kidnapped Al Anbar Governor Nawaf Farhan, a member of the Albu-Mahal tribe and cousin of Sheikh Sabah, the paramount sheikh of the Albu-Mahal. Governor Nawaf attempted to reconcile the conflict in Al Qaim, but found himself a pawn in AQI's campaign to intimidate the tribes into compliance. By kidnapping him, AQI had again gone too far. The act only further infuriated the Mahalawis and strengthened their resolve against AQI.<sup>38</sup>

In the midst of the conflict between AQI and Albu-Mahal, Regimental Combat Team (RCT)-2 launched Operation MATADOR on 7 May. The operation, planned before the fighting broke out between AQI and Albu-Mahal, was designed to disrupt terrorist activities in the Al Qaim region.<sup>39</sup> The resulting twin offensives against AQI—the Albu-Mahal's Hamza Battalion's and RCT-2's—were separate and uncoordinated. They both targeted the same enemy, but in different areas—the Albu-Mahal's primarily in Husaybah to the west and south of the river and RCT-2 in the east near Ubaydi and north of the river to the border (see Figure 2-2).

<sup>34</sup> Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Hannah Allam and Mohammed al Dulaimy, “Iraqis Lament Call for Help,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 May 2005, indicated that other Al Qaim tribes, in addition to Albu-Mahal, were also resisting AQI, but our research found no support for that contention.

<sup>36</sup> Iraq Tribal Study: al Anbar Governorate, 18 June 2006, Global Resources Group, pp. 4-17 and 4-28.

<sup>37</sup> Allam and al-Dulaimy, “Iraqis Lament Call for Help.”

<sup>38</sup> An al-Mahalawi is a tribal member of the Albu-Mahal tribe.

<sup>39</sup> MNF-I Press Release, “Victories in May,” 9 June 2005, <[www.usf-iraq.com/news/press-releases/victories-during-may](http://www.usf-iraq.com/news/press-releases/victories-during-may)>.

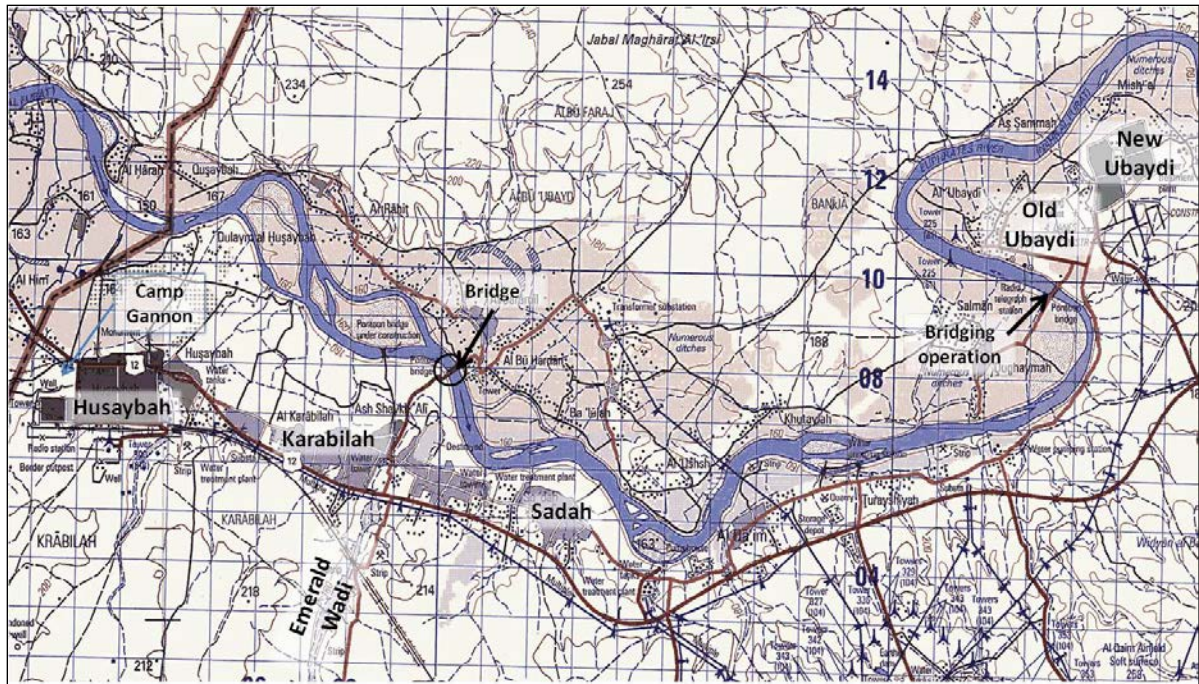


Figure 2-2. Al Qaim Area

When residents returned after fleeing the fighting of Operation MATADOR, they found destroyed homes and fellow tribesman, some who had remained behind to support the Coalition, dead. Fasal al-Gaoud complained that the Coalition forces did not discriminate between AQI forces and the growing tribal anti-AQI forces.<sup>40</sup> On-the-ground Coalition forces, still unaware of any Albu-Mahal request for help and unable to discriminate among what they considered to be red forces, claimed success in clearing insurgent areas. While the Coalition acknowledged that locals had provided intelligence information to support the assault, they remained dubious of local efforts to work with the Coalition in the fight.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the confusion, Albu-Mahal's Hamza Battalion cleared Husaybah and pushed AQI to the east into Karabilah—a town south of the Euphrates populated by the Karbuli tribe, an AQI supporter. With Husaybah cleared, the Albu-Mahals began reconstructing damaged sections of the city and established tribal security around critical infrastructure such as government buildings and services. According to COL Ahmad, future leader of the Desert Protectors, remaining pockets of AQI seemed to dissipate throughout June and July from areas around Husaybah as the insurgent group moved east towards Rawah.<sup>42</sup>

RCT-2 and, in particular, 3/2 Marines, recognized insurgent forces seeking sanctuary in the Karabilah area. Specifically, during Operation MATADOR, insurgent forces north of

<sup>40</sup> Allam and al-Dulaimy, "Iraqis Lament Call for Help."

<sup>41</sup> Allam and al-Dulaimy, "Iraqis Lament Call for Help."

<sup>42</sup> Ahmad interview, 18 April 2010. Rawah is located 57 miles east of the Iraq/Syrian border.

the Euphrates fled southwest across the “Golden Gate” bridge (see Figure 2-2) for sanctuary in Karabilah. Additionally, the Karbuli<sup>43</sup> tribe that resided in Karabilah joined forces with AQI against the Albu-Mahal and the Coalition. On 15 June, RCT-2 executed Operation SPEAR, aimed to root out AQI and disrupt its support systems.<sup>44</sup> According to Colonel Mundy, commander 3/2, the fighting against insurgents wasn’t heavy but it was steady as Coalition forces cleared houses and moved north towards the Euphrates. As Mundy described it, the significance of the operation was in the find:

We found papers, a computer with a big database of people that had come through, passports of all sorts from different countries, weapons stockpiles, and a school room with a chalkboard drawing out how to build IEDs. It was a class for IED building....we found what we referred to as the torture house....and several guys in there still in handcuffs. They had scars all over their bodies. There was one room in the house [with]...a big hook in the ceiling and they would obviously run these guys up, hang them upside down over a bucket of water. They would dip them in the water and then pull them up. They had a frayed electrical cord plugged into the wall that they would sit there and shock them. They had burns and marks all over their bodies. There was very obvious foreign fighter involvement there in terms of the types of weapons...all sorts of different makes of RPGs and rifles.<sup>45</sup>

### C. Al Qaeda Returns with a Vengeance

Albu-Mahal’s struggle with AQI was far from over. During June and most of July, under the guise of negotiations, AQI gathered thousands of fighters from Mosul, Diyala, Baghdad, and Salah ad-Din into the Al Qaim area. On 25 July 2005, after nearly two months of building up its forces, AQI returned with a vengeance. Injured in earlier fighting, Zarqawi, the leader of AQI took personal interest in this operation. Within four days, thousands of AQI fighters, heavily outnumbering the 300–400 Albu-Mahal fighters, attacked and killed 60 tribal members. They also destroyed 41 family homes by detonating each house’s propane tank, including that of Sheikh Sabah.<sup>46</sup>

AQI attacked from three directions: from the Syrian border area in the west, from across the Euphrates River in the north, and from the east; leaving the only route of escape open to the Albu-Mahal fighters to the south. The Mahalawis, outnumbered and out of ammunition, fled for their lives. Most sought refuge with other tribal members in Akashat, 100

<sup>43</sup> The tribe has also been referred to as Karbuli or Karabilah tribe.

<sup>44</sup> Bill Roggio, “Operations Spear in Anbar Province,” *Long War Journal* website, <[www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2005/06/operation\\_spear\\_1.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2005/06/operation_spear_1.php)> .

<sup>45</sup> Colonel Timothy Mundy, former Commander, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Regiment (3/2 Marines) in Al Qaim from March 2005 to September 2005, interview, Dr. William Knarr, his office at the School of Infantry at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, 14 January 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.

miles to the south of Al Qaim. Some travelled to Sufia, east of Ramadi, to stay with tribal brethren. Those who could afford to, fled into Syria or Jordan.<sup>47</sup>

Afraid for his tribe, Sheikh Sabah, from his refuge in Jordan, contacted the Iraqi Minister of Defense Dr. Sadun Dulaymi, and, according to Sadun, told him, “We need help, because our children, our women, old men, are all surrounded and...the terrorists are going to kill them all.” Upon learning this, the Coalition Commander, General George Casey dispatched an airplane to transport Sabah from Amman to Baghdad. According to Sadun, the Sheikh and a small group “...met together in my office and put together a plan to help the people of Al Qaim, not just the Albu-Mahal tribe, but all the people of Al Qaim.”<sup>48</sup>

In Al Qaim, prospects were grim for those who remained. The Mahalawis were no longer worried about AQI skimming profits or imposing a harsh social code. It was now a question of survival. As predicted by Sabah, AQI continued murdering and intimidating those al-Mahalawis who were trapped and could not flee. On the ground, Capt Diorio was getting regular updates from sources in Husaybah. He recalled, “Foreign fighters gathered to come kill my contact, my source, his family, and his immediate tribe [Albu-Mahal].”<sup>49</sup> Capt Diorio received a phone call from the East End Lady, who told him that that about 250 insurgents were at the “the palace.” “At the same time,” Capt Diorio said, “there [was] a lot of rhetoric that Zarqawi himself was coming to lead this, because he was annoyed by this Sunni tribe rising up against another Sunni tribe.”

This information, corroborated through other sources, started to gain traction, and Capt Diorio gained approval for an air strike on “the palace”—at least a 100 were killed. This angered AQI and prompted it to bring in more fighters to complete the assault on Albu-Mahal. The fighters moved into the largest hotel in Husaybah, the “yellow” hotel with 50–60 rooms. Capt Diorio received another call from the East End Lady, and he recalled her saying:

The guys who survived that other strike and a lot of guys who came in from out of town....there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these guys in the hotel.<sup>50</sup>

Again, other sources verified this information. In the meantime the Albu-Mahal were split between the northern part and southeastern part of the city. Soon, the Marines were receiving what seemed like was minute by-minute updates. Capt Diorio noted that:

We were getting frantic phone calls: “We’re getting run over.” And then perhaps the most surreal moments...we saw in the hundreds, Iraqis come out of the north end of the city towards our OP [outpost]...with their hands up. They are now coming in full daylight out of the city towards our OP with their hands up. Falzi,

<sup>47</sup> Ahmad interview, 18 April 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Dr. Sadun Dulaymi, former minister of defense, interview with Dr. William Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, in his home, Baghdad, Iraq, 24 April 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.

our source, was calling us saying, “These are my people please help them. We’re getting killed.”

This was a true turning point as the Albu-Mahal turned to the Marines for help. Capt Diorio continued:

To watch them openly see us as their help, as their rescuers, in broad daylight with their hands up was amazing. To me that was the point where the entire city, the foreign fighters, [and] AQI saw the Albu-Mahals say, the Marines are our help. And they came in droves.

At this point, the Marines understood exactly what was happening. They knew this was a significant moment and were ready to support it:

And again talk about discipline. I had Marines now who at this point had fought over 300 fire fights and had faced the largest attack against a Coalition Base. They’d been through a lot, and they withheld their fire in a real display of discipline. They read the people.<sup>51</sup>

But they also understood there was a high probability that some bad guys were hiding within this group of Mahalawis, so they were cautious and responded accordingly. Until they could sort things out, they told the approaching people, “We’re going to treat you like we would treat any other prisoner right now.” One of the people approaching the Marine outpost said, “I understand, and they [motioning to the others in the group] know it.” So, the Marines handcuffed and blindfolded them to sort them out when the situation stabilized.

At this point, the Marines had approximately 60 Mahalawis that they were processing as detainees. Capt Diorio began worrying about the situation worsening when he continued to receive troubled phone calls from Falzi’s family. At one point, one family member said, “We’re going to die. We’re getting crushed.” Diorio thought, “Hey, it was great that it worked for a while, but is this going bad now?”

But again, Capt Diorio’s Marines understood and responded. They perceived the Mahalawis cries for help as positive, and they were anxious to defend the tribe. At that point, Capt Diorio described the situation as “bigger than us [himself and his Marines].” He explained why:

...there was buy-in from the Marines...Colonel Mundy was involved. Colonel Davis was involved. The division was involved. They were all read into what was going on. They were sending up the request for airstrikes.

A Coalition airstrike eventually destroyed the hotel and saved Falzi and his family. Surviving members of his tribe evacuated south to Akashat. But Husaybah was lost. AQI came in with the Salmani, another local pro-AQI tribe, and took over the town, making life

<sup>51</sup> Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.

unbearable for those remaining. This happened at the same time 3/2 Marines conducted its Relief in Place with 3/6 Marines. Capt Diorio later recalled his parting thoughts:

I think what we were left with was an initial thought that this failed. Then as we continued to think about it, we thought that this is the tipping point that every counterinsurgency needs. This is the tipping point that you now have a Sunni tribe, Albu-Mahal, who to the point of their very own lives, sided with Coalition forces, sided with India Company, sided with Marine Corps.<sup>52</sup>

Capt Diorio may have identified the tipping point with benefit of hindsight, but when asked *What he would have done had he remained?* he replied, “I honestly think that we probably couldn’t have seen what we needed to see because of what we had gone through.” In contrast to most assessments that a Relief in Place can reduce local effectiveness in the short term, events in Al Qaim demonstrated an upside. That is, it was time for a turnover, time for a fresh set of eyes to work the problem.

Psychologically, the Albu-Mahal may have tipped, but physically, they no longer remained in Al Qaim. By 5 September, Zarqawi reportedly controlled the region and posted signs to that effect.<sup>53</sup> Despite a long list of Coalition real and perceived transgressions and a deep mistrust of the Government of Iraq (GOI), AQI’s savage and uncompromising trajectory towards fanaticism convinced the Albu-Mahals that siding with the Coalition and the GOI was a more palatable alternative to misery and death. AQI gave the Coalition and the GOI an opportunity to change the balance in their favor and under their terms. A modern day proof of Napoleon’s maxim that one should never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.

## **D. Changing the Balance**

In February of 2005, RCT-2 took responsibility for AO Denver, which included Al Qaim and four adjacent districts. RCT-2 was assigned an economy of force mission to “conduct counterinsurgency operations in order to disrupt and interdict anti-Iraq elements.”<sup>54</sup> Their objective was to support a successful national referendum in October and National elections in December 2005. Their approach was to conduct one or two major operations a month in the Western Euphrates River Valley, and to “disrupt and interdict anti-Iraqi elements,” both of which were tall orders for a small force. RCT-2 had 3,200 Marines and Sailors deployed in a 30,000–square-mile battlespace, facing a fluid enemy infiltrating from a porous border to the west and fleeing from a lost sanctuary in Fallujah to the east. They were the “little RCT with

<sup>52</sup> Diorio interview, 8 February 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Ellen Knickmeyer and Jonathan Finer, “Insurgents Assert Control Over Town Near Syrian Border,” Washington Post Foreign Service, 6 September 2005.

<sup>54</sup> Colonel Stephen Davis, USMC, former commander RCT-2, interview with Dr. William Knarr and Colonel Dale Alford, USMC, on 25 May 2010 at his office at the Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC), Camp Lejeune.

a division mission and a MEF battle space.” By any objective measure, RCT-2’s goal to “establish combined, permanent, persistent presence in major population centers in the Western Euphrates River Valley,” could not be accomplished with its assigned force structure.<sup>55</sup>

But what started as 3,200 Marines and Sailors on an economy of force mission in February 2005, grew to 14,000 by September 2005 and comprised US Marine, US Army, and Iraqi Security Forces.<sup>56</sup> There was also a redeployment of Special Forces teams into the area; their primary mission was Foreign Internal Defense, to work with indigenous Iraqis to help secure their own areas.<sup>57</sup> Major Martin Adams, Special Forces Company Commander, deployed Operational Detachment Bravo to Al Asad to work with RCT-2 and support the recently deployed Special Forces outlying Operational Detachments Alpha (ODAs) 582, 555 and 545.

Captain Jim Calvert, commanding ODA 582,<sup>58</sup> arrived in Al Qaim in August 2005, around the same time that al-Mahalawis were fleeing AQI. CPT Calvert’s mission was broad and nebulous: *Make life better for the Iraqis*. Calvert recalled the conditions at Camp Gannon as he arrived as far from optimal: “We got hit with about everything the insurgents had—small arms, machine gun, rocket propelled grenades, mortar fire—it was not a contested area, the insurgents owned it.”<sup>59</sup> If Coalition forces were going to “make life better,” they were going to need tribal partners on a full-time basis.

## **E. The Desert Protectors**

Reaching out and engaging the Sunnis in the area was critical to driving a wedge between the insurgents and the Iraqis and to changing the balance of popular support.<sup>60</sup> If the Coalition and GOI helped, they would have to deal with the perception that they were supporting a tribal militia. That might be seen as an anathema to Iraq’s central government’s legitimacy. To diffuse this perception, potential recruits needed to be vetted and drafted into government service.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> RCT-2 Briefing, 15 September 2006, Regimental Combat Team 2, Viking in the Valley, presentation to Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia.

<sup>56</sup> COL Davis, Commander, RCT-2 credits the increase in force structure to GEN Casey’s understanding of the situation and intent to exploit success in the Western Euphrates River Valley.

<sup>57</sup> The previously deployed ODA was 1st Group; it was there from January 2004 to Fall 2004. See Brent Linderman, “Better Lucky Than No Good: A Theory of Unconventional Minds and the Power of ‘Who,’” Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, December 2009.

<sup>58</sup> 5th Group, 3rd Battalion, B Company, now 5322.

<sup>59</sup> Captain Jim Calvert, Commander ODA 582, interview with Dr. William Knarr and Ms. Mary Hawkins, Alexandria, Virginia, 26 November 2010. Pseudonym used at the request of the service member.

<sup>60</sup> Multinational Force–Iraq Campaign Progress Review, 12 December 2004.

<sup>61</sup> At the time it was the Iraqi Transitional Government or ITG; however, we will use *GOI* throughout the volumes to represent the Iraqi Government.

Just as the Coalition and GOI viewed militias as an anathema to government legitimacy, the Sunni tribesmen, for the most part, found the stigma of being associated with the Ministry of Defense or Ministry of Interior just as repugnant. Therefore, this new organization, explained Dr. Sadun Dulaymi, would be known as the Desert Protectors and would be neither “fish nor fowl”—neither part of the Iraqi Army under the Minister of Defense, nor the Iraqi Police under the Minister of Interior.<sup>62</sup>

At a safe house in the vicinity of Camp Gannon, Calvert discussed local security force recruitment with representatives of the Albu-Mahal tribe. At the time, the only takers were the al-Mahalawis; they had already committed themselves by attacking AQI and were marked men. The remaining other tribes were too intimidated or had already sided with AQI.

In late August 2005, a team representing the GOI and the Coalition arrived by helicopter in Akashat to vet several hundred Albu-Mahal tribesmen for enlistment into government service. According to Colonel Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf, Commander, Desert Protectors, 279 were deemed fit and inducted. Of those 279, 89 were transported to the East Fallujah Iraqi Compound for training by Special Operations Forces.

While training and equipping a local force, the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment (3/6) replaced 3/2 Marines in Al Qaim on 10 September 2005 and occupied their sites at Camp Al Qaim, Camp Gannon, and the communications retrans site at Khe Sanh (Figure 2-3). Lieutenant Colonel Dale Alford, Commander, 3/6 Marines, arrived with an experienced unit, an aggressive plan, and a new approach to liberate the district from the grips of AQI.

Eighty percent of 3/6—including the battalion commander, company commanders, first sergeants, and non-commissioned officers—had fought together eight months earlier in eastern Afghanistan. Although there were differences in the type of fight in Afghanistan and Iraq, the similarities helped shape the unit’s concept of operations.

One such similarity between Iraq and Afghanistan was that the “population,” not the enemy was the center of gravity. LtCol Alford explained, “You need to understand your enemy before you can protect the population. You’ve got to figure out who needs killing and who doesn’t. The problem is we [the average Coalition Soldier or Marine] wanted to shoot at all of them. Hell, we were making insurgents!”<sup>63</sup> Alford argued that the number one group his Marines needed to deal with was “POI—Pissed-off-Iraqis.”<sup>64</sup> They had to believe that their interests were better served by siding with the Coalition and GOI than with AQI.

<sup>62</sup> Dulaymi interview, 24 April 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.



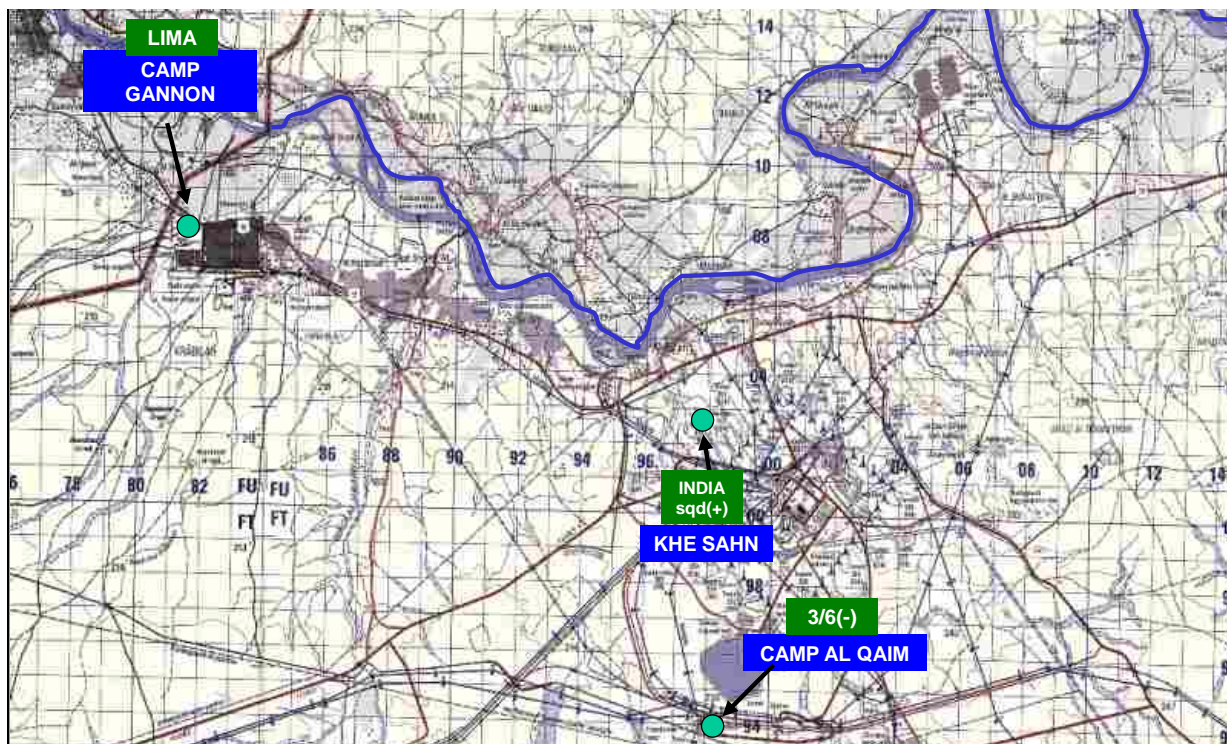


Image courtesy 3/6 Marines

**Figure 2-3. Disposition of Forces at Transfer of Authority**

A second similarity was the need for persistent presence. It made little sense to clear an area if there weren't enough forces to remain in it afterwards. Although 3/6, unlike its predecessor, arrived with its full contingent of Marines, it wasn't enough.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, 3/6 brought an understanding from Afghanistan that they must integrate with the indigenous forces. In late September, the 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division (1/1/1 IAD) was deployed to Al Qaim to work with 3/6. The new organization was designated Combined Task Force (CTF) 3/6. With the addition of the Iraqis, LtCol Alford now had the resources to establish a combined persistent presence within the population centers—the key terrain. As LtCol Alford tells it:

People ask [me]...where...I...came up with this concept. I don't really know. I can go back in books that I read as a young Lieutenant and Captain, like *First to Fight*, General Krulak talks about this. The Marines were doing this back in Vietnam in '67 or '68 before we really started doing it in '69, '70, '71 under General Abrams. This was before the COIN Manual came out in the Fall of 2006. What I'm saying is, this is nothing new. It is just protecting the population, in order to do that you've got to live where the population is, and that's what we were trying to accomplish. IRON FIST was nothing more than an operation to get into

<sup>65</sup> 3/2 Marines provided one of its rifle companies to Al Asad for base security; 3/6 Marines wasn't required to do that.

the people, to kick the bad guys out, establish ourselves, and stay. Once we moved into the city we weren't leaving.<sup>66</sup>

CTF 3/6 executed Operation IRON FIST during 1–7 October 2005, attacking from east to west through the town of Sadah and eastern Karabila, and stopping at the Emerald Wadi (tip of the arrow center of Figure 2-4). They built four positions: Chosin, Iwo Jima, Belleau Wood, and Khe Sahn and left a platoon of Marines and Iraqis in each.

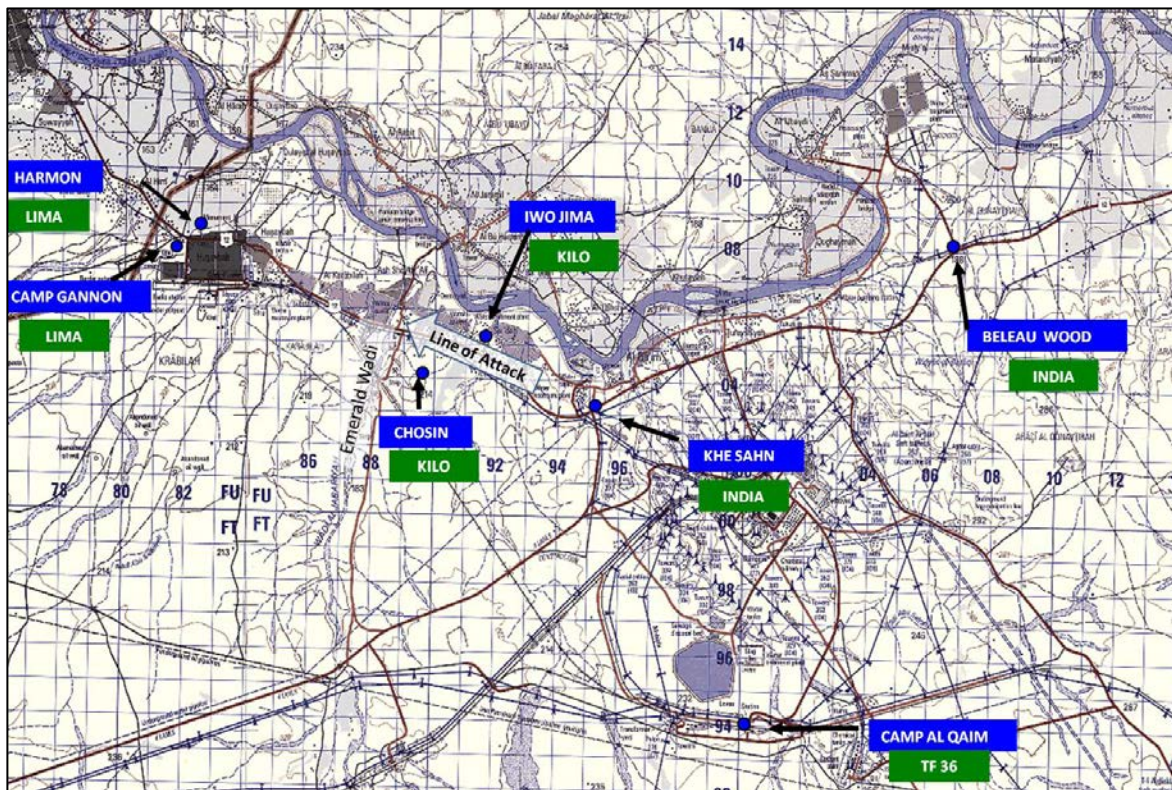


Image courtesy 3/6 Marines

**Figure 2-4. 3/6 Marines Disposition after Operation IRON FIST, 7 October 2005**

While focused in Al Qaim, IRON FIST wasn't conducted in isolation. CTF 3/6's higher headquarters, RCT-2, was simultaneously conducting a regimental operation dubbed RIVER GATE, in the area of Hadithah. CTF 3/6 and IRON FIST created a diversion away from the regimental main effort.

With the addition of more Coalition forces, Iraqi Security Forces, and the newly formed Desert Protectors, RCT-2 finally had the force structure necessary to execute their strategy—combined, permanent, persistent, presence. The resulting Task Organization, reflected in Figure 2-5, was much more robust than those forces available to RCT-2 earlier that year.

<sup>66</sup> Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.



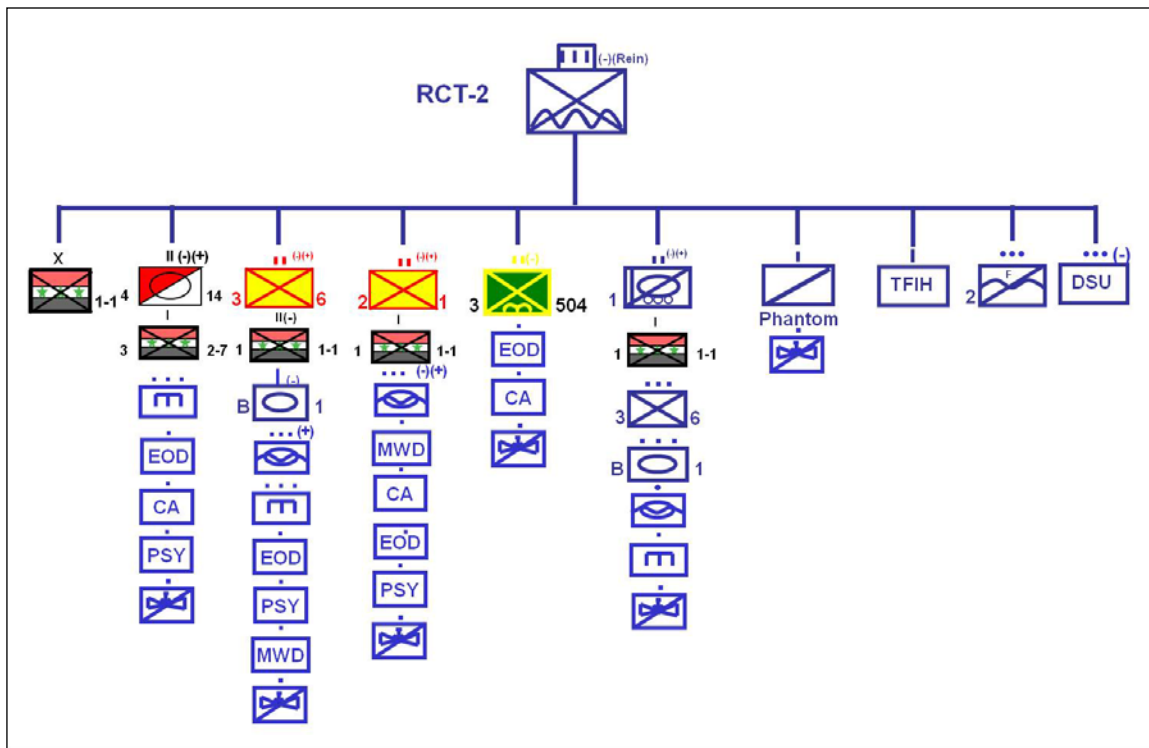


Image courtesy Col Stephen Davis

**Figure 2-5. Task Organization, Operation STEEL CURTAIN**

## F. Operation STEEL CURTAIN

CTF 3/6 had positioned forces on the east side of the Emerald Wadi at the conclusion of IRON FIST and continued to engage the enemy in Karabilah on the west side of the wadi. By all indications, it appeared that the enemy expected the Coalition to continue the assault from the east.<sup>67</sup> Instead, CTF 3/6 supported by Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/1, each with elements from the 1st Brigade, 1st Iraq Army Division (1/1 IAD) and the Desert Protectors, repositioned from Camp Al Qaim to the Iraqi/Syrian border where they would assault east through Husaybah and Karabilah.<sup>68</sup> The RCT mission statement follows:

At 0500 5 November, RCT-2 conducts Joint / Combined COIN operations to isolate and clear Husaybah, Karabilah, Ubaydi, & Ramana in order to defeat AQI forces, establish persistent presence, disrupt insurgent activities, facilitate Iraqi restoration of the border and set conditions for national elections in the Al Qaim region.

<sup>67</sup> Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.

<sup>68</sup> Those forces swung south through the desert to remain undetected as they moved to the border area and then moved north to reposition for the assault.

On 5 November, CTF 3/6 and BLT 2/1 assaulted into Husaybah and the area known as the “440 District” southwest of Husaybah, respectively. Simultaneously, elements of 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (3-504 Inf) inserted by helicopter to the north of the river into the Ramana area, a known insurgent sanctuary.

Despite the tactical surprise, it took CTF 3/6 and BLT 2/1 seven days to clear the Husaybah-Karabilah-Sadah area of insurgents. This was a sophisticated enemy. Insurgents wore Kevlar helmets and body armor and fought with a degree of discipline that reflected military or advanced terrorist training. All main roads and avenues of approach were laced with IEDs. Residential buildings were mined in order to target Coalition forces as they breached and cleared rooms. After engaging Coalition forces and encountering superior firepower, insurgents generally broke contact and conducted coordinated withdrawals to the east or discarded evidence of their actions and attempted to blend in with the population (see Figure 2-6). The enemy clearly knew what it was doing and how to do it.<sup>69</sup>

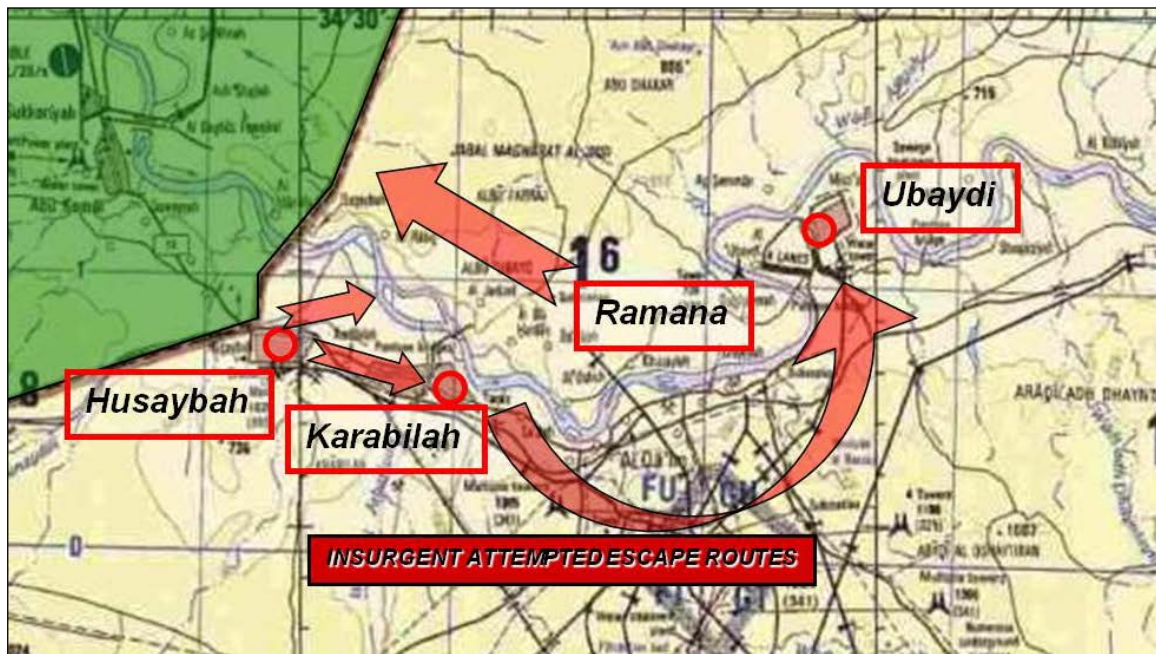


Image courtesy Col Stephen Davis

**Figure 2-6. Post-op STEEL CURTAIN Assessment**

Immediately upon clearing areas, CTF 3/6 started constructing firm bases with one in Husaybah followed by one in Karabilah. On 14 November, 3-504 Inf and BLT 2/1 attacked into Old and New Ubaydi respectively. On 16 November, Weapons Company, 3/6 Marines started construction on a firm base in New Ubaydi.

<sup>69</sup> Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

From 18–21 November, a Task Force comprising 4th Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment (4-14 Stryker) and the 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division (3/1/1 IAD) cleared the Ramana area north of the river.

Operation STEEL CURTAIN ended on 22 November 2005. An important but often overlooked accomplishment of that operation was that the Desert Protectors proved critical to the mission (see Figure 2-7, Desert Protectors post-mission celebration).



Image courtesy MAJ Mukhlis

**Figure 2-7. Desert Protectors Victory Celebration post-STEEL CURTAIN**

Major Mukhlis Shadhan Ibrahim al-Mahalawi, commander of the Desert Protectors, explained his mission had three primary objectives:

- [1] General military intelligence. “During the first stage we gathered a lot of intelligence like where the terrorists were staging, where their operations center was, where did they [the terrorists] plant IEDs.”
- [2] Fighting. During the second stage they fought side-by-side with the Marines
- [3] Human Intelligence. During the third stage they were used to identify insurgents. “We were the only ones who could identify people captured by the US Forces. Somebody could be a prince or an emir [among the bad guys]...we knew who was the prince, the emir, and who were the assistants. It was our job to identify them.”

CPT Calvert recalled that the Desert Protectors were employed primarily as scouts. As such, they were broken down into small elements and embedded with regular Iraqi Army and Marine units. In this role they were invaluable to the operation. However, according to Calvert, there were some negative aspects associated with employing such a local unit:

The Albu-Mahal's were massacred. If you have people who lost family members and they know that somebody else from another tribe was responsible for it, you have to keep a close eye to make sure there aren't any reprisals for past actions.

You also want to make sure that there's no perception that these guys are the new ones in charge and you guys [the other tribe] are going to be squeezed out. A lot of times in dealing with tribes, there is a zero sum game. [They think] that the Albu-Mahal's are doing well at the expense of the Karbulis and Salmanis. It's definitely a matter of appearing to be doing the right thing and not just doing the right thing. Perceptions go a long way.<sup>70</sup>

By late November, CTF 3/6 had constructed 16 Battle Positions in the area from Husaybah to Ubaydi. Each position included Marines and Iraqis—normally a Marine platoon and an Iraqi platoon or company. Those positions were located in such a way that they would reflect combined, permanent, persistent presence (see Figure 2-8). In other words, the Coalition and Iraqi forces were positioned to live amongst the people. The next step was to get to know the people.

<sup>70</sup> Calvert interview, 26 November 2010.



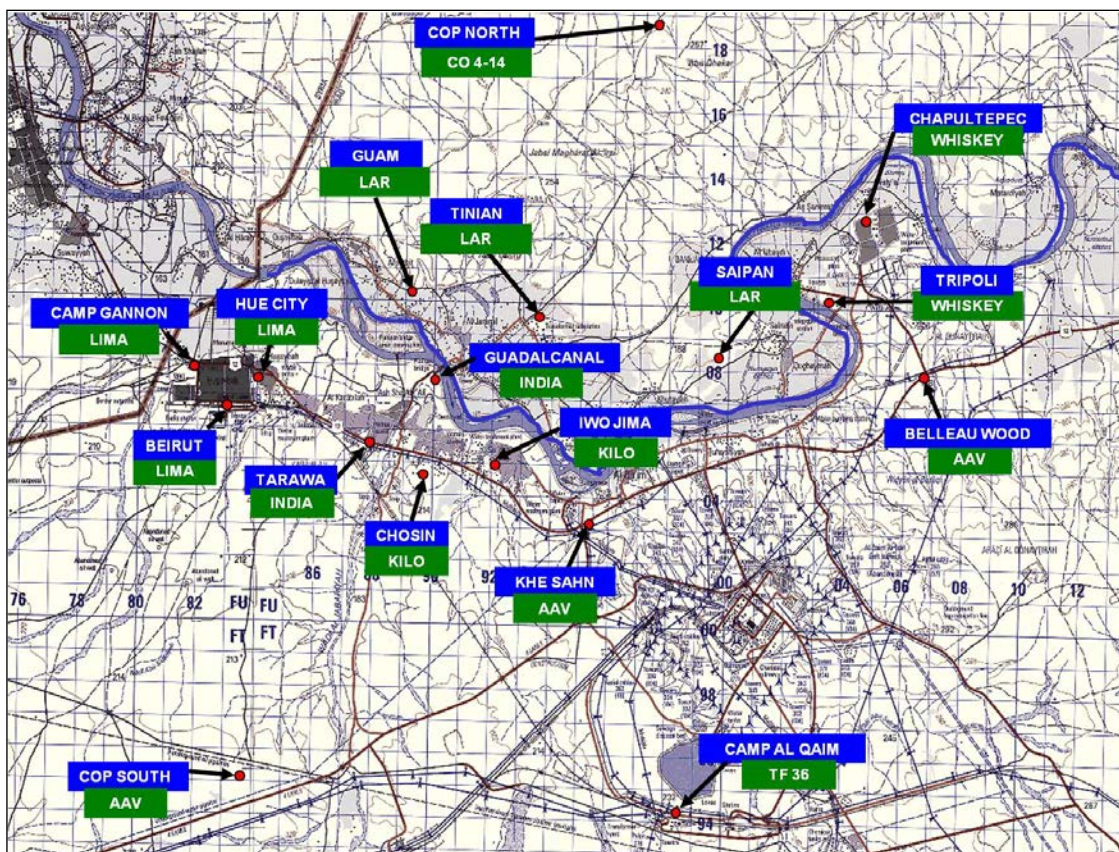


Image courtesy 3/6 Marines

**Figure 2-8. 3/6 Marines disposition after STEEL CURTAIN, 22 November 2005**

Mission analysis led LtCol Alford to assign company areas based on the tribal distribution—to link a company with a tribe. This was not an exact science because the tribes were geographically intermingled. The intent was to locate companies in areas where a majority of a tribe resided. As an example, India Company 3/6 dealt mostly with the Karbulis (see tribal areas in Figure 2-9).

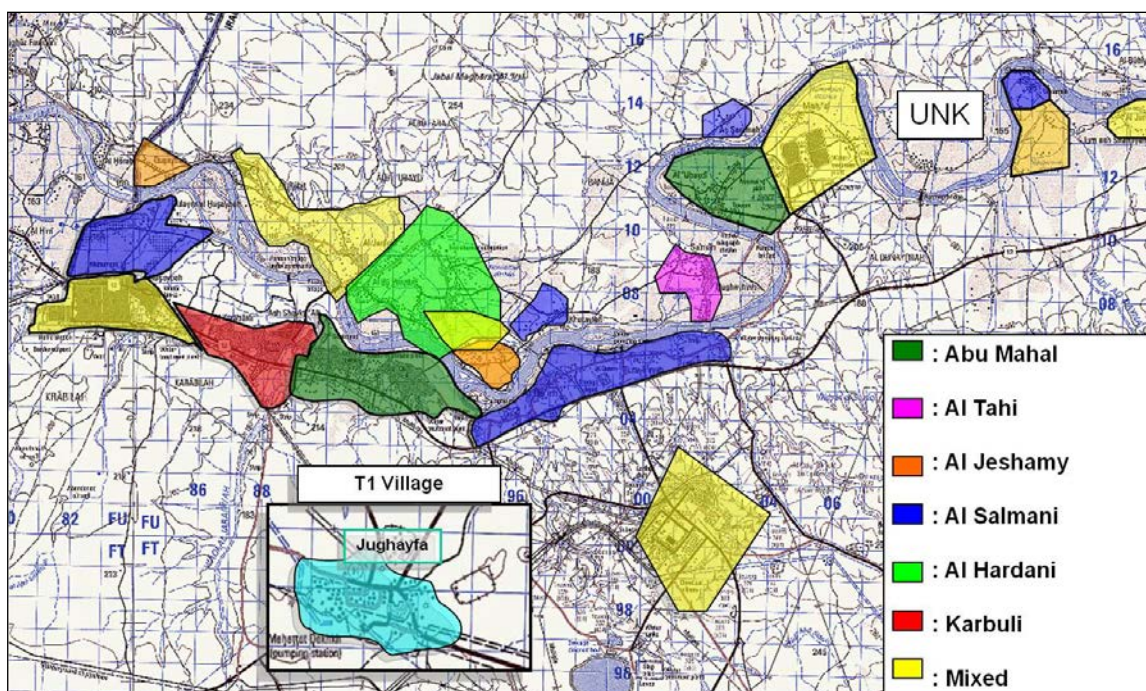


Image courtesy Colonel Nick Marano

**Figure 2-9. Tribal Areas in Al Qaim**

Additionally, the Marines attempted to treat all of the tribes the same and would not hold a meeting unless all the tribes were represented. According to LtCol Alford:

When only the three of the five tribes showed up, I gathered my crap, and told my guys, we're leaving. I told Mayor Farhan [that] when he got all five tribes, he could call me...About a week later one of the company commanders told... me...Mayor Farhan had them all. I showed up, and he had four of the five. The Salmani tribe was the one that didn't show that time. I did the same thing. I picked my stuff up and I left. A few days later he had all five, and then we started dealing.<sup>71</sup>

In practice, treating the tribes equally wasn't always easy. Albu-Mahal had taken the greatest risks and LtCol Alford had worked very closely with Sheikh Kurdi, so it was difficult not favoring them over tribes that had until recently sided with AQI. The Marines had to constantly remind themselves to maintain a balance. As such, during the drive to recruit tribesmen into the police force, the Coalition solicited help from the sheikhs to nominate men from their tribes and as they started developing police stations near the battle positions. This process allowed the Coalition and Iraq Army forces to partner with the police forces in those areas.

The day-to-day engagement with the population occurred at the lower levels—company, platoon and squad. At the company level, Captain Brendan Heatherman, Com-

<sup>71</sup> Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.



mander, Kilo Company 3/6 used the same technique for locating and assigning his platoons as LtCol Alford had used for assigning companies. He assigned platoons to different tribal areas, and he directed that the platoon commanders “be part of that tribe.” In other words, the platoon was to be an advocate for their tribes in requesting funds, developing projects, obtaining other resources. Capt Heatherman became a trusted arbiter. These close engagements helped the Coalition and Iraqi forces separate the insurgent from the populace. As Capt Heatherman recalled:<sup>72</sup>

We knew we really needed to make a connection with the locals to root out the insurgents. To do that, we needed to find out who the players were on the battlefield other than the locals. First and foremost was to find out who the enemy was.

As such, Heatherman identified four types of insurgent:

[1] The first was Al Qaeda in Iraq, former JTI (Jama’at al-Tawid wal-Jihad). We had plenty of foreign fighters, and we knew they were coming in through Syria.

[2] The second group was local home grown, yet still hard-line Al Qaeda. Once we really connected with the people, it was not very hard to figure out who they were, mainly because when we came in and actually stayed, they and their families did not come back.

[3] The third were what we called “part-timers.” They were locals who for whatever reason decided to attack us and then go back to their store or farm.

[4] There were also local, pseudo-Hamza groups who considered it their duty to oust anyone that came into their area. It was mainly the folks from Sadah that joined that.

Based on this analysis, Heatherman gave his platoons decidedly unconventional guidance:

I really wanted the platoon commanders to get down to that local level and become neighbors. I told them to be nosey neighbors. We want to know exactly what was going on. And we wanted them [the locals] to tell you [the Marines], because they are comfortable with you. So we patrolled meal-to-meal. You go out in the morning, and you have breakfast. Sometimes you bring food, and sometimes they would.<sup>73</sup>

This guidance was reinforced at the battalion level. One of the metrics employed by CTF 3/6 was known as “eats-on-streets.” Units would report the number of times they shared a meal with an Iraqi or ate a meal in a local café. Additionally, as units entered the community, they always had a specified mission; CTF 3/6 did not conduct so-called “presence” patrols. As LtCol Alford described it:

<sup>72</sup> Captain Brendan Heatherman, former Commander, Kilo Company, 3/6 Marines, interview, Dr. William Knarr, Marine Corps University, 24 February 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Heatherman interview, 24 February 2010.

You did not do presence patrols. When Marines do presence patrols, they'll walk out and they'll kick rocks because they have no focus. That's why ASCOPE is so good.<sup>74</sup> You can take one of the six letters of ASCOPE and always put a patrol to it. Okay, you know, S, Structures, you're going to go into this sector and you're going to document every structure in that sector, every structure on that street, and how it can be used by the enemy, how it can be used by us, and how it can be used by the people. You do ASCOPE through three lenses: the enemy, yourself, and the population.<sup>75</sup>

Despite information collected during ASCOPE, understanding the civil structure within a given area wasn't always easy. According to Heatherman, the community leaders in his areas were the sheikhs, imams, and mukhtar. The lead sheiks were not always present. As an example, the Albu-Mahal paramount sheikh, Sheikh Sabah, fled to Jordan in August 2005, leaving Sheikh Kurdi in charge.<sup>76</sup> Imams dealt very little with the civil side of things; however, they were still influential because they spoke to the entire community at the mosque. "We did not mess too much with the imams, because they did not want to be messed with," said Heatherman.<sup>77</sup> In his area, the mayor was the mukhtar.<sup>78</sup> In some areas the mukhtar were easy to locate, but you had to be careful.

When we went to Karabilah...I spoke with a guy who said he was mukhtar, but what I did not know at the time was that mukhtar could be the mukhtar of three houses or it could be the whole town. I spent two or three weeks with this guy thinking he represented the town of Karabilah, when he really didn't. But by the end of the three weeks he sure did, because we had empowered him with that area of the Karbulis in Karabilah. It was a big mistake. It caused some problems that we later overcame as we met other mukhtars and we started putting it [the civil structure] together.

When asked who pulled all of this information together, Heatherman responded,

Me [at the company level], but it was at every level. They [platoons and squads] had their own bank of knowledge about the area...this really caught on down to the lowest level. They figured out the importance of connecting with the local populace. It kept them safe, and it made them win; they liked it.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>74</sup> ASCOPE: Civil considerations in tactical planning concentrates on an in-depth analysis of Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations, People, and Events. FM 3-24.

<sup>75</sup> Alford briefing, 16 February 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Sheikh Sabah al-Sattam Effan Fahren al-Shurji al-Aziz, principal Sheik of the Albu-Mahal tribe in Al Qaim, interview with Dr. William Knarr, Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, and Ms. Mary Hawkins, Amman, Jordan, 3 February 2011.

<sup>77</sup> Heatherman interview, 24 February 2010.

<sup>78</sup> *Mukhtar* is an Arabic word meaning "chosen." In common usage, it describes someone who is in charge of a village or town.

<sup>79</sup> Heatherman interview, 24 February 2010.

## G. Combined, Permanent, Persistent Presence

In January 2006, Colonel Ismael Sha Hamid Dulaymi, deployed the 3rd Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division (3rd Bde/7th IAD) to Al Qaim. His unit would replace the 1st BDE/1st IAD that had deployed the previous October to support Operation STEEL CURTAIN. COL Ismael grew up in the Al Qaim region and was the cousin of Sheikh Sabah, paramount sheikh of the Albu-Mahal tribe. COL Ismael continued to command the 3rd Bde/7th IAD until March 2008.<sup>80</sup> He helped integrate the Desert Protectors into his Brigade with COL Ahmed becoming the battalion commander for the 3rd Battalion and MAJ Mukhlis becoming his intelligence officer. The 3rd Bde/7 IAD's location in Al Qaim provided the combined, permanent, persistent presence that was so important to stabilizing the region. COL Ismael worked with five consecutive Marine battalions as each rotated into the area. In each case, Ismael asked the incoming Marine commander how they were going to help him improve the area (see Table 2-1 for a full list of the units responsible for the Al Qaim district).

As an example, when Lieutenant Colonel Nick Marano, Commander, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines (1/7 Marines) arrived in March 2006, COL Ismael told him, "Colonel Alford established a lot of military bases throughout the area, so what are you going to do to support us?" LtCol Marano responded that they could do field reconnaissance to select a new battle position. COL Ismael, satisfied with LtCol Marano's response, said that they "...chose the Al Madi [phonetic] area. The field engineers established that area as Vera Cruz Battle Position and we manned it with a platoon from the Marines and a company from the brigade."<sup>81</sup>

**Table 2-1. Commanders and Their Units in Al Qaim**

Deployment Dates	Commander	Unit
March–4 May 2003		CJSOTF–W
4 May 2003–March 2004	LTC William Dolan	1st Sq/3ACR
March–22 Sept 2004	LtCol Matt Lopez	3/4 Marines
22 Sept 2004–25 March 2005	LtCol Christopher Woodbridge	1/7 Marines
March–10 Sept 2005	LtCol Timothy Mundy	3/2 Marines
Sept 2005–16 March 2006	LtCol Dale Alford	3/6 Marines
March–11 Sept 2006	LtCol Nicholas Marano	1/7 Marines
Sept 2006–28 April 2007	LtCol Scott Schuster	3/4 Marines
April 2007–7 Nov 2007	LtCol Jason Bohm	1/4 Marines
1 Nov 2007–5 May 2008	LtCol Peter Baumgarten	3/2 Marines
May–9 Nov 2008	LtCol Steve Grass	2/2 Marines

<sup>80</sup> Dulaymi interview, 15 April 2010.

<sup>81</sup> Colonel Nick Marano, USMC, former commander 1/7 Marines, interview with Major General Tom Jones, USMC, retired, his office at Camp Pendleton, California, 9 February 2011.

By May 2006, Coalition and Iraqi forces had extended their presence along the Euphrates from the Iraqi/Syrian border to Al Amaari. This was almost twice the area that had been covered in February. By September, according to Ismael, they once again doubled that distance and extended their presence to the Rawah/Anah area—57 miles east of the Iraqi/Syrian border. That concept of combined, permanent, persistent presence, introduced by Col Davis and LtCol Alford to the Al Qaim area in October 2005, was continued and institutionalized by the Iraqis with each subsequent Marine battalion rotation, each one improving the area's security. In many cases, those battle positions were partnered with a developing Iraqi police station. Later, when the local police could handle local security on their own, many of those battle positions were dismantled. With the security posture improving, LtCol Marano and COL Ismael could increase their efforts to improve the situation in other areas such as governance and economics by supporting the development of the judicial system, civic infrastructure, phosphate and cement plants, agriculture, and other areas.

Integral to all of those efforts was the continuous engagement with the Iraqis in what LtCol Marano called the Circle of Trust (see Figure 2-10). In this case, it included the Mayor of Al Qaim, the paramount sheikh and sheikh-on-the-ground for Albu-Mahal tribe, the Iraqi division and brigade commanders, and the S2 of the Brigade, MAJ Mukhlis (spelled Muklos in Figure 2-10), also the leader of the Desert Protectors during Operation STEEL CURTAIN.

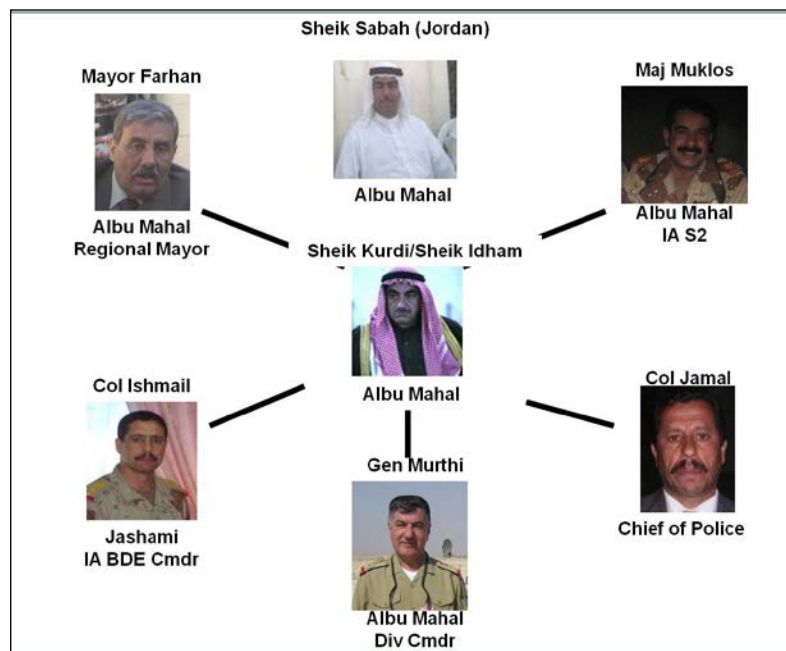


Image courtesy Col Nick Marano

**Figure 2-10. 1/7 Marines Circle of Trust, Al Qaim, 2006<sup>82</sup>**

<sup>82</sup> Ismael in the figure is spelled Ishmail.

It is important to note that at the center of the “Circle of Trust” was not a Marine or an Iraqi Government official, but Sheikh Kurdi. Sheikh Kurdi was there at the beginning and was clearly the key leader of the Albu-Mahal tribe throughout the Awakening process. He was a large man, with a no-nonsense but respectful and frank demeanor. He was clear about the original motivation for the development and organization of the Hamza battalion—their mission was to fight the Coalition, and as he exclaimed with some residual pride, “That’s a fact!” But as the environment changed to a time when being Mahalawi was reason enough for beheading by Al Qaeda and it seemed that things could not get any worse, Kurdi pointed to a period in August to October 2005 when things started to change for the better. As Sheikh Kurdi recalled, “When Colonel Alford and his Marines came, I said, ‘The sun of freedom rises in the west.’”<sup>83</sup> Alford, in turn would credit his Marines and all of those that he worked with: the Desert Protectors, the Iraqi Security forces, Colonel Davis, those units that followed 3/6 into Al Qaim for continuing to improve the situation, and others. Things started to change for the better when the right people, team, strategy, and resources, coalesced at the right time to stop Al Qaeda’s savagery.

## **H. Collection: Research Questions**

The primary and secondary research questions (PRQ, SRQ) listed in Chapter 1 guided the data collection.

### **1. How, when, and why did the insurgency start?**<sup>84</sup>

Sheikh Sabah listed three actions by the Coalition that set the conditions for the insurgency:

1. “The first mistake they made was asking if we were Shia or Sunni.” The root cause, according to Sabah, was that the Coalition did not understand the Iraqi culture. He added,

And as you know, in any country that is invaded, a resistance will start. I don’t think there’s any nation that does not resist an invader. A nationalist, patriotic, Iraqi resistance started, and plenty of the Americans respected that there was an Iraqi resistance.

Sheikh Sabah added that the Coalition talked to, and trusted, the wrong people when they entered Iraq; as a result a “lot of innocent people were killed and many more arrested.”

2. “The second mistake was...dissolving the Iraqi Army.”

<sup>83</sup> Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Under this PRQ, SRQs were: *Who participated and why did they join? How were they supported inside Iraq and outside Iraq by other countries?*

3. “The third mistake is that the Americans left the borders open. This was the biggest mistake. So, terrorists entered our country from all the neighboring countries—the Iraqis are still suffering from this.”<sup>85</sup>

Sheikh Kurdi echoed Sabah’s comments on the cultural underpinnings.

We have a long history, and social and religious traditions we are proud of. The American strategy in Iraq lacked knowledge of these traditions and it cost the Americans.<sup>86</sup>

Sheikh Kurdi also added that there was a tremendous patriotic resistance in Al Qaim and that the Albu-Mahal tribe organized and equipped the Hamza Battalion to fight the Coalition.

## 2. What was the Al Anbar Awakening(s)?<sup>87</sup>

In Volume II, the Awakening is characterized as “when the Sunnis (the people as represented by the tribal leaders) 1. Rejected the terrorists (AQI), 2. Joined the Coalition in the fight against AQI and other insurgent extremists, and 3. Supported and worked with the Iraqi National and Local governments and their security forces.”<sup>88</sup> That characterization offers a point of reference for the follow-on discussion.

Not everyone agreed with the term—the Awakening, or Al Sahawa. According to Sheikh Sabah:

We did not call it the Awakening; I objected to it being called the Awakening. In Arabic, *Sahawa* means awakening after you have been asleep, but we never slept. We were awake all the time.<sup>89</sup>

Sheikh Kurdi was irritated that recognition for the Awakening was attributed to Sheikh Sattar in Ramadi, eight months later, with little mention of the role Albu-Mahal played in Al Qaim.

Mayor Farhan reiterated Sheikh Kurdi’s contention that the Awakening started in Al Qaim and provided his definition of the Awakening.

The Awakening means the awakening of consciousness. In the beginning they called it *Rescue*, but they changed it to *Awakening* because it means more. Just

<sup>85</sup> Sabah interview, 3 February 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.

<sup>87</sup> Under this PRQ, SSQ were: *Is there a single definition? If so, what is it and if not, what are the other definitions? Do different groups define it in different ways? What are the various perspectives (Coalition, Iraqi, Insurgent, others)? Was there more than one Awakening?*

<sup>88</sup> This characterization was developed from Sheikh Sattar’s explanation and the Coalition objective. Recall that Sheikh Sattar was not as concerned about the movement’s connection to the GOI, but the Coalition was adamant that the GOI be included.

<sup>89</sup> Sabah interview, 3 February 2011.

look at the people who fight and support the Awakening group, like the Albu-Mahal tribe. They help us and support us, and they fight Al Qaeda. It should be a lesson to all, and this lesson comes from Al Qaim.<sup>90</sup>

It was clear from all the Iraqis in Al Qaim that the movement—call it the Awakening, Sahawa, Rescue, or whatever name you choose—started in Al Qaim. Colonel Ahmed, Commander of the Desert Protectors challenged the interview team. “When you see Sheikh Ahmed, ask him, ‘Did the Awakening group start from Al Qaim or from his area?’”<sup>91</sup>

### **3. What caused the Al Anbar Awakening and why was Al Qaim so important to AQI? <sup>92</sup>**

According to Sheikh Kurdi, the residents of Al Qaim initially welcomed Al Qaeda as the “the complete Jihad” to fight the invaders. However, by mid-2004, Al Qaeda began dominating the area and dictating the lifestyle to include meting out punishment for those Iraqis not meeting its standard. The leaders of Al Qaim met with the leaders of Al Qaeda and requested one thing: “to establish local authority here in the region, including police and an army. Al Qaeda completely rejected this and that was the beginning of the Albu-Mahal tribe separating from Al Qaeda.”<sup>93</sup>

The Albu-Mahal defied AQI’s rejection and established local authority. A mayor was appointed, and they formed a police force. But in two weeks, AQI killed the newly-appointed chief of police, Captain Ahmed Adiya Asaf, in the market area. “This sparked the first fight between the Albu-Mahal tribe and Al Qaeda.”<sup>94</sup>

Sheikh Sabah provided additional background:

...people were infiltrating our country through the borders—that they were bringing weapons and money...Al Qaeda controlled the area and hundreds of terrorists entered. They became the second largest force after the American Army. They started implementing their terms to the Iraqi people and started killing innocent people...In 2004 they assassinated a member of my family. He was the Chief of Police for Qaim. Then the problem started between us [the Albu-Mahal] and them.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Mayor Farhan De Hal Farhan, Al Qaim, interview with Dr. William Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, USMC, and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, in Al Qaim, on 17 April 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Ahmad interview, 18 April 2010. Colonel Ahmed was referring to Sheikh Ahmed Albu-Risha, Sheikh Sattar’s brother who took over as lead of the Awakening movement when Sheikh Sattar was assassinated.

<sup>92</sup> Under this PRQ, SRQs were, *What caused the Anbaris to turn against AQI? Why did they seek help from the Coalition? What were the notable events of the Anbaris turning on AQI and joining with the Coalition? Was the GOI a partner in the events? Was there a relationship among those events?*

<sup>93</sup> Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Kurdi interview, 17 April 2010.

<sup>95</sup> Sabah interview, 3 February 2011.

In May 2005, Albu-Mahal managed to rid Husaybah of AQI, but AQI prepared to return and retake Al Qaim. Why was Al Qaim so important to AQI? Sheikh Kurdi explained the strategic importance of Al Qaim to AQI, not only to Al Anbar but to Iraq:

Al Qaim's strategic location was very significant to Al Qaeda. They thought that by controlling this area—because it's on the Iraqi border—they would have supplies, finance, and weapons; everything they needed to support operations. When they lost this location, this strategic location, they lost everything: all the logistics support that came from outside Iraq was cut off. No more support of any kind! That's why when they lost the battle here, they lost everything inside Iraq because everything was coming through the border. It was not just supplies from Al Qaim to Anbar Province, but supplies to all Iraqi provinces.<sup>96</sup>

The significance of this terrain was not lost on the Coalition. Blocking the Syria/Iraqi border along the Euphrates at the Husaybah Port of Entry and securing Al Qaim was part of the Coalition's larger strategy to restrict the movement of foreign fighters and resources, including suicide bombers and IED materials, from Syria down the Euphrates to Baghdad.<sup>97</sup>

In August, after gathering its forces from the provinces, AQI returned; Sabah recalled:

I was on my way to Amman on 21 August 2005. I arrived here on Tuesday. On Thursday night, Al Qaeda attacked Husaybah. My tribe had 65 armed men. And there were about 4,000–5,000 of them. They were stationed in Karabilah and Ramana near the Syrian Border, and they were attacking Al Qaim from all directions.

Sheikh Sabah contacted the Albu-Mahal commander on the ground and told him to pull back and go to Akashat. According to Sabah, "They pulled back towards Akashat and hid their families. And other tribes' families started to come with us. They were scared of the war. Sixty of our fighters reached Akashat."<sup>98</sup>

#### **4. How did the Awakening in Al Qaim reconcile the causes listed above?<sup>99</sup>**

The Albu-Mahal's first steps of turning on AQI and partnering with the Coalition and the Iraqi Government were the most important actions to address AQIs actions. Sheikh Sabah explains:

I called the Minister of Defense, Mr. Sa'dun Dulaymi, and I went to visit him in Baghdad. The US Deputy Ambassador and the British Ambassador were there during the meeting. From that day on I told him I would arm the Albu-Mahal tribe. Within a week, the Americans and Iraqi trainees reached Akashat. They gave them cars and weapons. Within two months, the force returned to Al Qaim

<sup>96</sup> The Awakening started long before the concept was realized and coined in Ramadi.

<sup>97</sup> Davis interview, 25 May 2010.

<sup>98</sup> Sabah interview, 3 February 2011.

<sup>99</sup> Under this PRQ, the SRQ was, *Who and what events contributed to the reconciliation?*



and liberated Qaim. And thank God, nobody [from AQI] has returned to Al Qaim.<sup>100</sup>

The next steps were the development of the security forces and the institutions. Integrating the Desert Protectors into the Iraqi Army and the local police forces legitimized the force. Per sBG Ismael, stabilizing Army recruits from Al Qaim so they could remain in the area for one year was critical to filling the ranks of the Army, in particular for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 7<sup>th</sup> IAD.<sup>101</sup> The Coalition's and Iraqis' ability to attend to other lines of operations as security conditions began to stabilize enabled continuous improvement throughout the Al Qaim region from October 2005 to 2008.

## 5. What were the major themes and lessons from the Al Anbar Awakening?<sup>102</sup>

There are a number of themes from events in Al Qaim significant to the Anbar Awakening movement:

1. The significance of the Al Qaim district to AQI and the Coalition
2. The first significant turning of a tribe against AQI
3. Tribal engagement and the partnering of the tribe with the Coalition and GOI
4. Combined, permanent, persistent presence
5. Al Qaim's revolt against AQI was part of a continuous storyline, connected to events in Ramadi, and one of the critical enablers of the Anbar Awakening movement.

Themes 1-4 were discussed in response to the above research questions and throughout the storyline. Theme number 5 needs more explanation and is discussed below.

Most accounts of the Awakening begin with Sheikh Sattar's *Sahawa* movement in Ramadi, September 2006–07. Although some acknowledge the Albu-Mahal tribe's actions in Al Qaim during 2005–06 as the first tribal uprising against Al Qaeda, they characterize the two movements—in Al Qaim and Ramadi—as isolated and unrelated.<sup>103</sup> In the Coalition's eyes, it might seem that the two events were disconnected, but to many Iraqis, there was a strong connection through tribal communications, coordination, and affiliation, in particular among three of the tribes: Albu-Mahal, Albu-Nimr, and Albu-Risha.

<sup>100</sup> Sabah interview, 3 February 2011.

<sup>101</sup> Dulaymi interview, 15 April 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Under this PRQ, requirements were, *Did these themes and lessons contribute to success in the larger context of Iraq? Are they transferable to other areas such as Afghanistan or Africa? Should they be incorporated into doctrine? Should they be taught at the various PME institutions, and if so, how?*

<sup>103</sup> It is a commonly held belief that the events in Al Qaim and Ramadi were disconnected. Individuals with this perspective, for example, include, James Soriano, Department of State, Provincial Reconstruction Team Leader in Iraq 2006–09 and LtCol Kurtis Wheeler (*Al-Anbar Awakening Volume One: U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009*, 2009).

After the invasion, relations between the Coalition and tribes in Al Qaim were initially friendly but turned sour in 2004 as the insurgency grew and the environment became non-permissive. As a result, the Coalition lost trusted ties to the community.<sup>104</sup> It was not until 3/6 Marines entered in September 2005, executed their strategy of combined, permanent, persistent presence and when the Albu-Mahal sought help, that they could fully re-engage the tribes. But the tribal dynamics were much more complex than simply the connection between the Coalition, the Albu-Mahal, and the GOI. The involvement of other tribes and families would answer the question, *Was there a relationship between events in Al Qaim in 2005 and Ramadi in 2006 or were those events isolated/unrelated?* The following discussion addresses some of those relationships.

When Sheikh Sabah needed help in August 2005, he turned to Dr. Sadun Dulaymi, Minister of Defense under Prime Minister Al Jaafari. Sadun turned to GEN Casey for help and received funding, equipping, and training. Additionally, ODA 582 was assigned advisory responsibility for developing those tribal forces. Hence, when the first tribe of any significance turned on AQI and sought help from the GOI and Coalition, GEN Casey fully supported the initiative. Most of the Albu-Mahal tribesmen fled to Akashat, but some fled to the Ramadi area and al-Mahalawis were found later working with Sheikh Sattar and Sheikh Jassim in the Ramadi area Awakening movement.

There were other ties between Albu-Mahal and Albu-Risha. Sadun, the principal GOI coordinator for the Desert Protectors was Sheikh Sattar's uncle. He grew up next to Sattar's family's compound in Ramadi. There was also a connection between Sheikh Sabah and Sheikh Sattar. According to Sabah, Sattar met him in Jordan to discuss the Albu-Mahal's success against AQI and AQI's grip on the Ramadi area and to suggest how he might defeat AQI.<sup>105</sup>

Sattar also met with the sheikhs in Jordan to gain their approval and support for his upcoming fight. Notably, Sheikh Majed Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman, co-regent to the Dulaymi Confederation, supported the Albu-Mahal tribe's revolt against AQI in 2005. He, along with other notable sheiks in Jordan, approved Sattar's request and convinced Prime Minister Maliki to support the Awakening; similarly, Maliki said that there would be "No Awakening unless Majed and the sheikhs agree to it."<sup>106</sup>

Among those attending the meeting with Sattar and Majed was Mr. Numan al-Gaoud, a businessman and owner of the Doha Group in Baghdad.<sup>107</sup> The Al Gaouds are a promi-

<sup>104</sup> Monte Morin, "Interpreter has seen good and bad of Operation Iraqi Freedom," *Stars and Stripes*, 8 December 2005.

<sup>105</sup> Sabah interview, 3 February 2011.

<sup>106</sup> Sheikh Majed Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman, interview with Dr. William Knarr, Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, and Ms. Mary Hawkins, Amman, Jordan, 3 February 2011.

<sup>107</sup> Mr. Numan al-Gaoud, owner of the Doha Group in Baghdad, interview with Dr. William Knarr, Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, and Ms. Mary Hawkins, Amman, Jordan, 13 February 2011.

nent family in the Hit area and belong to the Albu-Nimr tribe. The Albu-Nimr and Albu-Mahal are closely related and share ancestry.<sup>108</sup> Recall during the early stages of Albu-Mahal's fight with AQI, it was Fasal al-Gaoud, a member of the Albu-Nimr tribe and former Governor of Anbar Province, who contacted the Americans at Camp Fallujah on behalf of the Albu-Mahal. The significance of the Al Gaoud family is discussed in Volume III-B, Hadithah Triad and Hit. In Volume II, Colonel Michael Walker was convinced of this relationship between tribal members and Awakening events and attributed American's inability to recognize the relationships to "Coalition versus Iraqi" time. This is where the Marines saw the sequence of events in seven-month rotational increments, but the Iraqis could see and connect the entire timeframe, from 2003 to 2008.<sup>109</sup>

## **I. Continuing Effort**

The above themes, lessons, and leads provide additional insights into the research questions. They are refined, refuted or validated, and built upon or reveal new and unique findings and lessons as the Awakening is viewed from strategic to tactical levels and from the various perspectives. The follow-on volumes build on those themes, lessons, and leads.

<sup>108</sup> Mr. Jalal al-Gaoud, Iraqi Businessman in Jordan, interview with Dr. William Knarr, Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, and Ms. Mary Hawkins, Amman , Jordan, 5 February 2011.

<sup>109</sup> Colonel Michael Walker, interview via telephone with Dr. William Knarr, Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC, and Ms. Mary Hawkins, 6 January 2011.



## Appendix A. Coalition Perspectives

### Notes on conventions used in the transcripts

- In general, the Marine Corps Anthology was used as a guide to format the transcripts.
- Time “hacks” on transcripts correspond to video so they can be used to identify areas to use as clips for the movie and DVD.
- The rules we followed for al- or Al- or Al in a proper name: For a person’s name, when “al” is in the middle of the name, in a last name, for example, it should be lower case with a hyphen, such as Nuri al-Maliki. If the name is by itself then it’s capitalized, such as Al-Maliki.

The majority of tribal names begin with the term *albu*, a formal characterization of *the*. When the tribal name is included in an individual’s name, the prefix “al-” is added and the tribal name changes slightly, usually with the addition of *awi* or *i* at the end. For example, Albu-Risha becomes al-Rishawi and al-Assafi denotes a member of the Assaf tribe or Albu-Assaf.

The following table is provided to give the reader an appreciation for the number of units that rotated through Al Qaim. Readers can refer to the table for a specific timeframe to see what unit was assigned responsibility for the area. It lists the commanders and units responsible for the Al Qaim AO from 2003 to 2008.

**Table A-1. Commanders and their Units Responsible for Al Qaim, 2003–08**

Deployment Dates	Unit Commander	Unit
March–4 May 2003		CJSOTF-W
4 May 2003–March 2004	LTC William Dolan	1st Sq/3A CR
March–22 Sept 2004	LtCol Matt Lopez	3/4 Marines
22 Sept 2004–25 March 2005	LtCol Chris Woodbridge	1/7 Marines
March 2005–10 Sept 2005	LtCol Timothy Mundy	3/2 Marines
Sept 2005–16 March 2006	LtCol Julian Alford	3/6 Marines
March 2006–11 Sept 2006	LtCol Nicholas Marano	1/7 Marines
Sept 2006–28 April 2007	LtCol Scott Schuster	3/4 Marines
28 April 2007–7 Nov 2007	LtCol Jason Bohm	1/4 Marines
1 Nov 2007–5 May 2008	LtCol Peter Baumgarten	3/2 Marines
5 May 2008–9 Nov 2008	LtCol Steven Grass	2/2 Marines



11 August 2011

Subject: Interview with Colonel Timothy Mundy, former Commander, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment in Al Qaim from March 2005 to September 2005.

Colonel Timothy Mundy commanded the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment (3/2 Marines) in Al Qaim from March 2005 to September 2005. After Operation AL FAJR cleared the insurgents from Fallujah in November/December of 2004, many insurgents fled to Mosul in the north, Ramadi, and to Al Qaim, along the Syrian border. Additionally, Al Qaim was a staging area for foreign fighters as they crossed into Iraq from Syria, so it became a major sanctuary for Al Qaeda in Iraq.



**Col Tim Mundy, Former  
Commander, 3/2 Marines**

Colonel Mundy currently commands the School of Infantry at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. He was interviewed at Camp Lejeune on 14 January 2011 by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr. This is his account of events in Al Qaim during the first half of 2005.

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Dr. Bill Knarr: Please start with your background, where you are from, how you started, when you took command, and your predeployment train-up.

Mundy: Obviously, I talked to folks who had been there before me: now-Colonel Matt Lopez who had had 3/7 out there and was in contact with Colonel Chris Woodbridge, a friend of mine, who had 1/7 out there. So I kind of knew that we were heading into a pretty kinetic fight, for as much as we wanted to do COIN [counterinsurgency] things, it was still very kinetic out west.

But when I got to the battalion in the summer of 2004 and took command, two full companies were deployed. Really, we were still at the point where we were building the battalion, but even what we had built was deployed as part of the anti-terrorism battalion under 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, which was the Anti-Terrorism Brigade at that time. They were deployed to Djibouti and Afghanistan, in essence doing guard duty for different elements. I was really short going through staff turnover and getting people in place. Not unlike a lot of battalions do, but in this case, even the Marines I had were kind of scattered all around the world at that time. So, I did what I could to get things in place and start focusing the battalion on developing a plan for how we were going to train and get ready. But I really don't believe I had the battalion back in full, all the companies re-

assembled with the commanders in place and getting our Marines in place, until probably October 2004. Then we deployed in February.

So when you talk about the full battalion and what time we had available to really focus on the mission and train and prepare, there wasn't a lot of time to do it. We focused on basics. We tried to get the Marines very proficient. That's probably why I ended up in the job I'm in now. I mean, kind of my focus of, "Hey it's important to know the basics and be very good at what you do." I think that can translate into a lot of the things later on, but nonetheless, there were a lot of challenges with that in terms of just time available and Marines in the right place to be able to accomplish it. So, it was pretty challenging. Again, everybody's got their own version of that, but pre-deployment training was not as scripted; I don't recall it being as scripted as it is to the degree it is now. There are more things that they offer the battalions getting ready to go these days. In some cases, you probably feel like your hands are tied because you have to send Marines to a bunch of these courses, but it's all good training. We had a lot of those types of things to do, but nonetheless, that mixed in with holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, a pre-deployment leave period, and just getting ready to go, meant we were on a pretty short timeline to get out the door in terms of full training time with the battalion.

Knarr: So, Mojave Viper.

Mundy: Mojave Viper back then was just a modified CAX [combined arms exercise]. We didn't even call it Mojave Viper at that time. I went out there, and, again, based on what I had learned of the area and really my own estimate of the situation in terms of what I thought the battalion was going to be doing, I went out to 29 Palms and ran, in essence, company, but really platoon exercises. A lot of the ranges that we focused on were platoon and below. The focus now is probably going to be a squad leader/platoon commander's fight when we get over there. And so I wanted them proficient with their Marines, and really controlling and doing that kind of live fire training. We did some battalion things, but I deliberately tried to spend our time that we had available on letting them do the ranges that they needed to up to company. Because again, it wasn't a full CAX...it was modified, a little bit shorter. The company still ran 410 Alpha<sup>1</sup> and some of those bigger ranges that were out there, but not the normal CAX where you're doing full battalion-level fire support coordination exercises and things like that.

<sup>1</sup> 410 Alpha is a range designed for a company-sized exercise.



From there we moved down to March Air Force Base. About ten days of what was, again, part of Mojave Viper now, where you're out there in the town they've built out of the containers. But all of that was done in an old housing area at March Air Force Base. It's actually a great training venue in terms of being in that environment. It's very much like some town, because it had been a housing area. The streets weren't exactly regular, and you had real houses and trees and things to work around. The staff there was focused on what I considered eastern Iraq, sort of full up into COIN and fully involved with the people. There was a police force that was working. There was a local government, Therefore, it was very much the idea that you're going to be hand-in-hand with the locals working through problems. Occasionally there would be an IED [improvised explosive device], a fire fight, a sniper, or something that breaks out. They really tried to focus us on a more non-kinetic fight.

We actually had some conflict there, because my Marines were in some ways reacting to things that they knew from me talking to them about the environment. They knew they had to be careful going into a kinetic environment. I always told them that it's a light switch. You have to be able to turn it on and off. Shoot the bad guy, but then turn it off again, and deal with the people that are around you. I think they understood that, but nonetheless, their mindset was a little bit more kinetic through that. And again, the staff there thought we were, in some ways, being heavy handed. For what ended up happening during the deployment, we probably had the right focus. But of course I'm biased. I was the one who chose to do it that way.

In fairness, I think the environment we went into bore out the preparation. In some ways, they were trying to prepare us for an environment that was not what we were going into. They'd read a lot of after actions [reports] from units that were working in other areas east that were a little bit more calmed down. They really didn't look at the environment out west. Probably not until MATADOR and SPEAR did people really even start to take notice even within our own division, for that matter, did people understand that there really was a lot more going on out there. So, it wasn't just the staff there. The Marine Corps at large had thought we had moved into a different phase all across the country without recognizing the differences in the environment. [7:53]

Knarr: So you went in for your PDSS [pre-deployment site survey]. When was that?

Mundy: Pre-deployment site survey was about mid-December. I don't remember the exact days, but about the 10th to the 18th or something like that. I recall because my wife

thought I wasn't going to be there for Christmas when the flights started getting delayed. I had planned to take my operations officer [OPSO], sergeant major, and a couple of key people with me. However, because of theatre restrictions and just getting the right amount of lift, it came down to just the battalion commander going on the PDSS. So each of us as the different commanders, myself, Colonel Steve Neary with 3/8, and Bill Journey with 1/6, and I believe Colonel Davis took his OPSO. There were a bunch of us that just went in as a group. We got to a particular location, flew in, and then just kind of all scattered. I think we all showed up at Blue Diamond [Division Headquarters] and were briefed by then-Brigadier General Dunford, who was the ADC [assistant division commander] at the time. He gave us a run down on where they had come about half way through their time on the ground and what had evolved.

Then we split up from there. I went out and spent a couple of days with the 31st MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit] staff, now General Miller, who was there as the CO [commanding officer] of 31st MEU on the ground. Then I went on out to 1/7 and spent about three or four days out there with Colonel Woodbridge and his Marines getting a feel for the area. Again, everything I saw from the 31st MEU out just continued to confirm what I thought I was headed into when we came back in terms of the environment out there. But, again, even then it was still not widely recognized beyond the people who were really living in it. I recall several of my peers, you know, those guys that I named, when we were traveling saying, "Hey, is there not anyway you can get switched over to RCT-8? You'll be doing a lot more if you're over here in Ramadi with us." Certainly they saw a lot of action there. Erik Smith with 1/5 running around and folks like that. Everybody saw their fair share. They thought out west it was wide open desert, and there's nothing going on. And again, it took some of the bigger operations to finally wake people up to what was really going on out there. Interesting time! [10:38]

Knarr: What's particularly amazing about that is they just finished up AL FAJR in November. You get there in December. They ran a lot of exploitation operations right around the Fallujah area trying to get things set up for the elections. Their focus may have been on Ramadi and Fallujah for that very reason, and they may not have been thinking about out west.

Mundy: Right. Even Colonel Tucker with 7th Marines had a good talk with me when I came back in February and was moving through there on the way out. Obviously that was his focus toward the end. They had been over there in Fallujah as RCT-7. That's why the 31st MEU was in place when I came through on the PDSS. But he seemed to have a sense that

he knew what was going on out there. It's not that everybody missed it, but the focus was just further east. And again, as things started moving along as part of the Campaign Plan, it just tended to overshadow what was happening out west. The battalion, 1/7, in that case was really in a dogfight. But you know, everybody thought it was still kind of quiet out there. I just don't think it registered with everybody focused elsewhere.

Knarr: When did your advance party get into...

Mundy: I don't think we had anybody gone over the holidays. I think they deployed in January, got in place, and started doing all the turnover and everything. Then I rolled in in about February. We did the transfer of authority [TOA] with 1/7 and then had it until about September or so. We turned over with Dale Alford out there. [At Figure A-1, LtCol Mundy accompanies LtCol Woodbridge to meet the Al Qaim leaders during their TOA.]



**Figure A-1. LtCol Woodbridge and LtCol Mundy meet with Al Qaim Leaders**

Knarr: So you got there in February. What sites had you organized and developed at that time?

Mundy: Everything was south of the Euphrates. He [1/7] had an LAR [light armored reconnaissance] company or LAR Company minus. He had that as an attachment. They used

to run across the bridge and spend some time running up and down north of the river, kind of patrolling that area. At some point along the way, probably as the operations east—AL FAJR and everything—got going, his LAR attachment got pulled. So he had not been north of the river in several months and really had Camp Al Qaim, which was the train station itself. That was kind of proper with companies operating out of there, and then his one company, Bravo 1/7, which was up at Camp Gannon just on the outskirts between the border, a checkpoint, and the town of Husaybah.

There was one other radio retrans site. It was just something they had to keep established, which we did as well through the whole deployment. A little radio retrans site kind of out in the open just north of the camp, so that we could talk to the Marines just based on how the terrain was. We had Marines out running patrols or doing raids. Anywhere along the river you needed the retrans site to make sure you could stay in communication with them. So, that was a small outpost about a platoon or a platoon minus at a time that would be out there. Occasionally, they'd get shot at. I mean, they were sitting out in the open. It was very difficult for them to do anything other than lob a few rounds at them. Occasionally they would, and we would counter fire either with mortars in support or they would just engage with rifle or machinegun fire or whatever they thought they could do. That was just sort of a rotating tour that the Marines had to do out there. It was good for the NCOs [non-commissioned officers], staff NCOs, and junior Marines to get out there and live out in bad guy territory, although we never really felt there was any real threat. I mean they were basically hunkered down on a little hill with concertina wire and all sorts of stuff all around them. There was no real threat of them being overrun. It was just that you didn't want to take unnecessary casualties, so it was kind of hard living out of bunkers for the time period you were there, because you were within range of somebody taking a potshot at you. But that was really the only location that we manned for the battalion proper.

We patrolled all around the area, but there were no established battle positions. I know from talking to Colonel Alford that they started to establish battle positions and then occupy areas to maintain presence and keep the enemy out of that area. My manpower was such that we really just didn't have the strength where I felt I could maintain any kind of a battle position other than where we were in force and patrol the areas. [16:38]

Knarr: You mentioned before something about a tank platoon?

Mundy: Yep, a tank platoon was attached to me the entire time. I also had an engineer platoon. Those were direct attachments to the battalion. I had some other smaller elements like an information operations cell, which was in essence a lieutenant and a couple of Marines. They had been trained in information operations. He actually was an artillery liaison officer and those were artillery men who were with him. They did some information operations work for me, but he was also a darn good watch officer, because he understood fire support and could help out in planning normal operations and things like that.

So we kind of used who we had in whatever best capacity fit them. Standard I think for the time, you know, Staff Judge Advocate on the Staff, a CMO [civil military operations] planner. In essence, he was a reserve I'll say captain or major. I'll think of his name here in a minute, but you know civil military ops planner with a couple of Marines, but almost just more staff augments. I really didn't get any additional Marines other than the few they brought with them. But we tried to use him as much as possible to focus on trying to talk to the locals when we go out—trying to find out what could be done and help improve roads or build a school. And also do the normal projects like handing out soccer balls like everybody likes to do. I'm convinced that Iraq probably has more soccer balls per capita than any place in the world nowadays. But, they're things that you try to interact with the locals and find out what they needed.

But again, security is a requirement for anything to be maintained for very long. That presence has to be there for them to really believe that you care and you want to make something last. So, while they were happy to work with us on some of these projects, there was always a delicate balance. Again, I just didn't have the force to really maintain a lot of presence, so it was kind of a sporadic thing where you could work with them. And that didn't always mean that the insurgents came along and destroyed what you had worked on, but you know, you were never really sure if that was going to have a lasting impact on the people, because you might not be there the next week and the bad guys would be. In that case, the fact that you built them a road only lasted as long as you were around to help them drive on it. So, it was tough trying to get real results out of things like that. Those were probably the real attachments in terms of organization of the battalion.

I mentioned to you that we had the field surgical suite at that time, which was a huge capability in terms of really a field emergency room, but it was nonetheless a very significant surgical capability, so we could do a lot of valuable work in saving Marines and getting them back there. We had the two helicopter, Black Hawk det[achment] that was a Medevac det out there as well as the aviation combat element forward deployed, which

wasn't a part of 3/2, but by virtue of only the range of those helicopters, huey and cobra mix that was out there, little dets that would rotate through that really couldn't fly for anybody else. So I would have the pilots come up and sit in some of our meetings. I'd run down and sit in the ready room with them and talk about things and cover it. We established a good working relationship, because for all intents and purposes they were a part of the battalion task force. Again, everything they did out there supported what the battalion was doing on the ground. So while I didn't have a direct line and block chart pointing to them as a direct control or a part of my organization, everybody kind of got on board even to the degree that the combat service support elements that were out there, some maintenance capabilities, things like that, everybody kind of got it that we're all part of one team out here. We've got to work together. [21:01]

Even the contractor reps and folks that ran the little KBR chow hall and things like that. It was very much a feeling of community, and I don't take that lightly. We did a lot of things to generate that kind of atmosphere. But everybody kind of got it that we were way out in the hinterland by ourselves, and we all have got to pull together to get through this. So, I very much enjoyed a feeling of being kind of the mayor of the whole camp even if it didn't belong to me technically by design on a line-and-block chart. Everybody pretty much responded to what the battalion needed done. It was good. It made a great relationship for the Marines out there. They enjoyed it, and we got a lot of great support across the board from everybody who was out there. They really knew what the mission was, bought into it, and wanted to be a part of it. Even when we had memorial services for Marines that were killed, I'd get KBR chow hall folks that would come up and stand there and pay their respects. The field surgical suite personnel and everybody would fall out for those things. It really showed the difference from that kind of environment versus a place like Al Asad where it's so big that some units never cross paths with one another. They don't even know who's on the camp with them. It was a great environment out there.

Camp Gannon was up there pretty much with a rifle company. I always had one of my mobile assault platoons up there with them. And at times I would have a tank platoon or a section of two tanks out of a tank platoon split up there. But that was really just dependant on the mission, what they happened to be doing at the time, and how it fit into the overall battalion operations. For all intents and purposes, he was a rifle company on his own up there with mortars and a mobile assault platoon and as far as attachments. That was about it for him.

Knarr: Did you have a HET [human exploitation team]?

Mundy: We did. We had a CI [counterintelligence], HUMINT [human intelligence] kind of thing that was up there. A handful of interpreters obviously contracted there. I'm trying to think of whether we had AAVs [amphibious assault vehicles] or not. I don't recall. I'd have to ask Gunner. He would remember if he comes up here later on. I mean it seemed like we were always moving around on either trucks or HMMWVs (high mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicles), so I don't recall. There may have been times we had AAVs as part of different operations that would come up there. Actually, I know we did, because there were a couple times we hit mines with them. They were there, I just can't recall. I'll have to look and figure out whether they were a normal attachment. And they probably were, because that was probably a thought towards having some armored capability with AAVs and the tanks up there at the same time. CI, HUMINT we ran our own little detention facility just for initial questioning and hanging on to people for a few days, but obviously anybody of any significance had to get moved back to Al Asad where they had the real one that was run. Now we got inspected. We had folks come through to make sure everything was running according to the right policies and regulations and to make sure that we weren't doing anything illegal or just making it up as we went along. So it was professionally run, but there was a smaller capability out there. It was really just for initial interrogation—to find out if we had somebody of significance or get some information that we could put right back into use through our own operations out there. [24:58]

Knarr: Was there RADBN [radio battalion]?

Mundy: They were there part of the time. They may have been there when I got there. I certainly remember them. They kind of occupied an end of the camp where we made sure we kind of left them alone. I'd stop by occasionally and visit, but they were in essence on their own and really reporting back to the division in terms of feeding intelligence back through that would eventually come back to us, but they were not directly answerable to us really.

Knarr: What about an ODA [operational detachment alpha]?

Mundy: At times they would come through. We had different special operations forces that would roll through there, but they were not really part of the organization. When they came through it was usually just coordination, making sure we could support what they did, helping them out. But there was never really any formal arrangement there. Occasionally 1st Force Reconnaissance rolled through. It was a little bit different when Chris Woodbridge had 1/7 there. At least for a time, if not for his entire deployment, Colonel Pete Petronzio was there with 2nd Force Reconnaissance. They were there as part of the

task force, so everything that they did at that time was out of the Al Qaim area. They were up there doing raids and not necessarily answering to Chris, but again, it was like a same kind of arrangement. We were all on the camp operating in that area, so it seemed a lot more like an attachment to him at the time when I was there going through the PDSS. I sat in a couple of their briefs and watched a few raids they did. When I got there, Colonel George Smith with 1st Force Reconnaissance was really working directly for the RCT [regional combat team]. He came out to my area and did an operation out there, but again, that was more of just us in support of them operating down through the 440 based on some intel that they had at that time. But again, he was working directly for Colonel Davis in RCT-2 all around the area. It didn't look like the same arrangement that 1/7, at least for a period, had with the force reconnaissance company working directly under the battalion out there or really in the area whether they reported to him or not. It was still doing a lot of complementary operations out in the area.

Knarr: Okay, so we're in February. You know, of course, the only thing that I'm aware of is April and the Gannon bombing. What happened through February and March?

Mundy: Have you seen that video of the bombs going off?

Knarr: I have. Colonel Davis showed it to me, and he's got a really good video of it. I've found it on the web, but I'll tell you, it's under Ogra.com, which puts their little mark there, and it's never good resolution. I found it in other places, but it's not good resolution.

Mundy: I can give you what I've got off this disc when we're done.

Knarr: If you would please.

Mundy: It's the enemy's version. It's all in the distance and you can't really see it, but you can definitely tell the explosions are going off.

Knarr: Well, good, in fact. I'd like to show it and for you to walk me through it.

Mundy: Okay. But, February we got there. We had the transfer of authority. We started doing operations, really kind of taking our time. Again, I had that sense that the Marines needed to get out and understand the area and get used to operating there. So we really just started doing some local patrolling, moving out around the area, and didn't have a lot to go on. I mean, you're always getting pot shots taken at you. Occasionally you're hitting a mine or something. Early on there was not a heavy IED threat probably because out west we had the luxury of open desert. It was a completely different environment than perhaps 1/5 or 1/6 in the areas east where they were more constrained to cities and mov-



ing through towns where you had to be on a road and an IED was a lot more effective. We just didn't operate on the roads much at all. So because we could roll through the desert, it wasn't very effective for the enemy to try and employ IEDs against us, because you never knew where we were going to pop up. There were a few choke points.

There was one particular wadi, probably Wadi Battikahn here on the map [later called Emerald Wadi by the Marines] just out of Al Qaim. Every time we would travel to go out to Camp Gannon there was a huge wadi. There were only a few places you could cross, and they would always mine those few places. Now that made it fairly easy for us to also recognize they were always going to hit those same spots. So we'd stop, and let some of the engineers out. They'd sweep for it and usually find them, detonate them, and move on. So, I really didn't take any casualties, although occasionally we would still have a vehicle hit one. But thank God, there were no casualties to those of significance. Occasionally they'd catch us somewhere out in the open and it was almost hit or miss. They would put it where they thought we were going to travel based on some track we had laid previously. Even if we tried to not follow the same path twice, eventually you're crossing some piece of ground twice. So occasionally, we'd hit something. Anyway, we did a lot of that kind of patrolling.

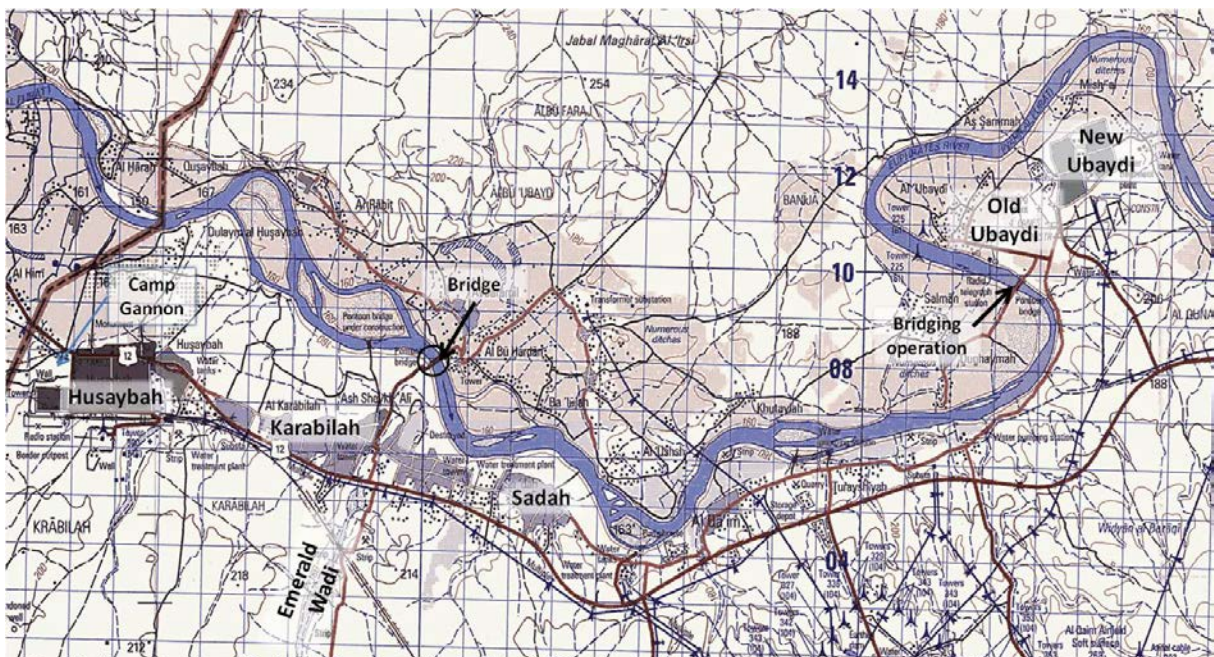


Figure A-2. Map of the Al Qaim area

At Camp Gannon [located west side of Husaybah—see blue arrow in Figure A-2] India Company had just taken over the areas that 1/7 had occupied. It was really Camp Gannon proper, which is outside the city. And then there were just a few buildings really on the very northwest corner of Husaybah that had been all shot up. They had moved out and occupied, and it was their Forward Platoon, almost like an outpost, although it was within a couple hundred meters of the main camp, where the rest of the company was. It was barricaded, you know, HESCO barriers, so you couldn't get to it other than from inside Camp Gannon to move out to that area. They had a Platoon Forward out there, because they could observe parts of the city that you couldn't see from Camp Gannon. Primarily, you could look down on Market Street, probably the busiest area of Market Street right along there. It just seemed to be the routine up there that somebody would come along Market Street and challenge them by either taking a few sniper shots or stop to try to pop off an RPG or something. Most of our initial little fire fights were up around Camp Gannon. There were kind of sporadic things going on up there or somebody would take an occasional shot at some Marines that were out patrolling. There was never really any significant, organized resistance. It didn't look like we were fighting a well organized enemy until, really, April. That was probably the tip-off, because the attack on Camp Gannon was so significant. It clearly was well planned, well organized, and executed darn well. I mean it really was. [32:57]

Knarr: You know, the thing that always threw me on this map—on Falcon view—is it shows Camp Gannon a kilometer away from the border. But it was right on the border from what I could tell when I went up there. When I marked it on GPS and put it on Falcon View, it came up on a map and it looked like it was a kilometer away. But I was right standing on the border. So it really kind of always surprised me when I looked at it.

Mundy: Let me see if I've got a larger scale map. This is probably the same as what you're looking at here.

Knarr: Okay, here it is. You see, see right there. I tell you what, I was looking at Asad's face right there!

Mundy: There's a Syrian Guard Post and everything that is literally right there.

Knarr: So it seemed to me that this had to be wrong. This line on the map had to be wrong.

Mundy: This is probably the old British-drawn international border. In fact, at the time, we had all these little checkpoints out in the middle of the desert. As I mentioned, we would leave Al Qaim to cross this wadi and basically just spread out and drive through the de-

sert. We would always come around the west side and enter Camp Gannon, because it was just too dangerous to go anywhere in or near the city.

This border is very fluid, wavy. It looks nothing like these straight lines for kilometers that it looks like on here. It was some old road or something that's probably existed for centuries. The Syrians had actually built up a berm on their side to kind of denote that and it really didn't match this. So on my C2PC [command and control personal computer], I enjoyed pointing out to the CNN camera crew that would be up there with me, that by the way, welcome to Syria. You're technically in it right now. That would always get their attention. But we would be driving somewhere way out here, which again, that border while it showed up on the map really meant nothing. It didn't mean anything to the Syrians either. It was somewhere west of that, came in closer, and went back out. So you're right, it looks like you're a long way from it, but you're not. If you ever get a hold of Major Diorio, he'll tell you that on one or two occasions, the Syrian guards would fire off a couple of rounds toward Camp Gannon from their side. I don't know whether they were just drunk or having fun or something.

Knarr: Yeah, we traded emails. I'll see him when I get out there.

Mundy: Well, I hope so. He'll have a lot more to talk about that! But Camp Gannon, yeah, technically exists as a big HESCO barriered piece of the city almost.

Knarr: Now you said the other platoon, you said it was a platoon then?

Mundy: Camp Gannon is like a big HESCO barrier camp. And then you went down this road, which also had HESCO barriers along the side of it. In essence, the platoon position was out here. Although the Marines didn't occupy all the space in between, in essence it was an extension of Camp Gannon into the town so that they could be looking straight down Market Street and a little bit into the southwest part of the town out there.

Knarr: Where's 440 at?

Mundy: 440 is this very distinct block down here [directly south of Camp Gannon, see Figure A-3 below, bottom left corner]. Frank might remember exactly what it was. It was just a very neat collection of houses. This city was built, as you can tell by the roads, very lined out and very organized as opposed to some of these that just grew up along the terrain. But that seemed to be a housing area, probably for the phosphate plant or something. It was almost like what we call New Ubaydi. It was a very much Washington, DC-style city, every street goes exactly north/south or east/west and the houses are all simi-

lar. 440 was very much that way. Although this is laid out in some ways, the houses were different construction. That was pretty much organized like if you work at such-and-such a plant, then you moved into this part of town. And everybody's house looked the same. Why they did that, I don't know, but that's what it looked like. So, to be honest, I don't know where the name comes from, but that's what it was called when we got there. Everybody learned it and referred to it, and that became 440. And we thought several times there might be something going on down there. Again, Frank would give you more details, but I don't recall that we ever really had a lot of problems down there.

When I mentioned George Smith and 1st Force Reconnaissance coming out there, they did a raid where they went through a bunch of the houses down there expecting to find something in one night. And as I recall, we really didn't turn up much of anything down there. It tended to be people coming through the city along Market Street attacking and challenging that forward position. Or I think what you'll see when I show you the video is the person that was videotaping the vehicles attacking Camp Gannon was probably sitting in one of these houses just south of that platoon position. They were basically looking up at a guard tower and where you can see where one vehicle goes off outside, and the other two hit...

Knarr: So they were coming from Market Street? [39:19]





**Figure A-3. Camp Gannon and Husaybah**

Mundy: It looks almost like they drove up from the south and looped around, trying to suppress the platoon position. Where the two trucks went through, I don't know. I think they basically came from the south and broke through a little bit of the barricade to try to get in the main entrance to the camp. Again, when you walked out of Camp Gannon proper, you went through, in essence, where we had a guard post and a gate of some sort, although there was never really any vehicle traffic moving through there. You'd walk out. You were behind a HESCO barrier, but it wasn't very high. So in essence, double-time across that open area staying as low as you could until you got out to the other building to where the platoon was. Then you could move around through the buildings and have more cover and concealment. So they actually punched through that area. As I recall, they basically busted through some of the barricades between the two positions. One vehicle was heading to it to try to suppress the platoon that was forward. Then the other two peeled in. Again, I believe one car attempting to breach what they probably thought was a real gate that had to be blown down with the fire truck intending to go behind it

and pull through. Obviously I mentioned once the first one [bomb] goes off there's nothing but dust and debris flying around. That was part of what helped keep them from being successful and actually entering the camp. Also guys like Lance Corporal Butler, who stood his post, got blown down every time one of them went off, but got back up and continued firing, kept them from entering the camp. I mean just heroic stuff. He was eventually awarded a Bronze Star. It's just a phenomenal story.

Knarr: He lived through it?

Mundy: Oh yeah! Remarkable! He had pieces of the vehicle stuck in his helmet. It's just by the grace of God that one of those didn't hit him somewhere where he wasn't wearing armor or helmet or something. He was blown backwards and got back up and picked up his M249 SAW [squad automatic weapon] and started shooting. He was probably one of the few eye witnesses to what was happening, especially the fire truck coming in. There was another post sitting on the southeast corner of Camp Gannon, really looking south toward 440. So those Marines were there, but I doubt they could really see. They could look up toward where he was posted, but probably couldn't see where those vehicles were coming through.

Knarr: So they hit the wrong place?

Mundy: They hit the right area. They knew where they were going. That's why I said they had done their homework; it was very well organized and well planned, but they probably didn't have a good idea that there was not a straight shot through that gate...that really they had to weave.

Knarr: Was that the main gate?

Mundy: Yes.

Unless you went way out west and tried to come around. There was an entrance that we always used, but to do that would have been way out in the open and the Marines would have seen you coming. So that was very difficult to do. It was probably the main entrance, but again, we didn't drive through it. It probably had existed at a time when 3/7 for a time would drive up and down Market Street. As a matter of fact, I don't know if you know Colonel Lopez or not, I think he's now retired.

Knarr: I do. I've met him.

Mundy: But he was shot at one point during one of those movements through there, through the vehicle. It's where Corporal Dunham somewhere out here won his Medal of Honor. They

would actually move through the city coming and going from those areas. That's when it was getting bad. But for us, we never really used it as an entrance. They picked the right spot, but again, from what we could see of the remnants of the fire truck, number one, he got in the vicinity of where he should have gone through, but probably didn't know to negotiate a weave. And for that matter with all the debris, he really turned short of it and hit the HESCO barrier in front of where Butler was standing. Then he probably thought he was as close as he was going to get and detonated there. So what little was left of the fire truck was there. When you went, I doubt there were any buildings worth anything left standing out there. In the video, you can vaguely pick it out. It's kind of grainy, but you can tell there are a few rooftops of these areas that were inspection stations.

At a time when Iraq and Syria were doing trade, it was almost like a big warehouse without walls. Some kind of inspection station where you'd pull your truck in, and they'd probably check you and inspect the contents and do something like we do at our checkpoints. There were a few buildings there, the *Welcome to Syria* and Asad sign as you pulled on through, but pretty much all that disappeared with the fire truck going off. It just completely obliterated everything. It was remarkable to see the before and after. I know we had some photos. I couldn't find any unfortunately. There were a few pictures somebody took of me and Major Diorio walking around out in that area beforehand, and I remember going back and looking at them and comparing them to what we had after April when that had gone off. It was stunning how much damage that one did when it went off. [45:33]

That was April. You can see the distance between Camp Gannon and Al Qaim. It rattled the windows in Al Qaim, and of course then we were getting all the calls. I mean it knocked people down even though they were five hundred to six hundred meters from the blast, inside a building. Marines were knocked out of their racks and everything. It was enormous! But the fire fight went on up there for about two days after, off and on.

There was a concerted effort at the time those vehicles exploded for a real assault element to follow up, probably somewhere in the vicinity of 25 or 30 fighters who seemed better organized than a lot of the local recruits that get all whipped up and sent in to fight there. I mean, these guys seemed to know what they were doing. I think they expected to exploit a big open hole, cause a bunch of casualties, and cause confusion. Certainly there was a lot of shock from the blast, but the Marines basically manned positions, because they were still all right. They fought the initial assault and then it just continued as a kind of a running gun battle back and forth for several days after that. I supplied them the tank platoon and the helicopters flew anytime anything started up, so they had a lot of support up there.

Knarr: You said 20 to 30 people. Did they come out of the east from Husaybah?

Mundy: Yeah. Frank can confirm this for you, but as I recall, if they were an organized group that seemed like they had been better trained, typically they were all dressed in black. I remember the Marines talking about that. Everybody was coming out in all black dress, all black garb. It wasn't necessarily a uniform, but as close to it as we ever saw. A lot of times, like I said, you could tell the difference between a trained insurgent fighter, who was actually moving and shooting and using almost our type of tactics—fire and maneuver kind of things—versus the occasional, every couple of days they'd run into somebody who clearly had signed up to fight the Americans, and they'd give them some basic training. "Here's your RPG," or "here's your rifle, go out there and shoot at them." They were typically not dressed the same and didn't know how to take cover as well. It kind of made easy targets for the Marines to return fire on them. So, you could tell a difference there. [49:05]

Knarr: You know, what interests me also about this is that after AL FAJR, they were moving north into Mosul, and they were moving west along the Euphrates. It seems that this is the first really organized attack by Al Qaeda against your positions. This may have been the first development of those guys out there.

Mundy: Right! And I think I mentioned to you, I don't recall exactly when it happened, but I thought it took place after this that there was a very well organized attack against the Abu Ghraib detention facility. It killed a few soldiers there, and it was very well organized. It reminded me very much of that type of thing, where they had clearly studied it. They couldn't have direct eyes on, so they didn't know exactly what we had out there, but they had identified a place to create a breach, a need to suppress the platoon that was forward of the main camp, and then really, an attempt at running one vehicle through to breach and another one to exploit and run through the gap. Had it worked, the effect could have been disastrous. It would have wreaked serious havoc on the company's CP [command post]. A lot of the Marines were right there where the truck would have come through. And then if in all of that confusion had guys stormed into the camp, I'm sure they would have eventually been overwhelmed. Certainly you would have had Marines and insurgents running all over the place in mass confusion.



I just don't recall the time of the other one [2 April 2005<sup>2</sup>]. But as I read about it later, it occurred to me that this was almost identical kind of planning that went into this type operation. And again, that was probably our first indicator that we had a sophisticated enemy, at least some of them, out west. They were getting trained somewhere. They understood some tactics. They had done some great planning on that attack, while unsuccessful. Of course they followed it up. We would track it on the websites. Our interpreters and CI, you know, folks that could read some of the stuff would go to different websites and find that, of course, Zarqawi and others were claiming that they had killed 50 Marines, shot down helicopters, and all sorts of stuff that was pure info ops and pure propaganda on their part. And obviously, everyone in the area knew something big had happened and vehicles had blown up; it was enormous!

Frank will give you the better sense of this, but in hindsight, this was probably the first indicator to a lot of the population in Husaybah that these guys are all about business, and they were professional. Because the Marines went out and told the people what the real story was. Frank interacted with some of the locals. He told them that the Marines didn't take casualties. They fought these guys and in some ways they showed that the insurgents were trying to cause mass destruction. Yet even in all that chaos and fire fights that were going on afterwards, it didn't turn into just a free-for-all. The Marines were very disciplined in their response. They were obviously shooting at people that were fighting against the Marines and not just targeting anybody who happened to pop up. So it seemed to me a measured response, which is pretty remarkable for those young Marines given what they had just been through. But in a lot of ways, I think that showed a lot of the locals that these guys are disciplined and professional. They really are here trying to do the right thing, and so that helped.

But that gave us some indication, again, probably confirmation of a lot of things that were going on tied into the intel that, again, Colonel Davis was seeing a lot of the different intel and feeding some of that down to us—there's a lot more sophisticated enemy out in this area. The realization that we were giving them free run north of the river, that they were moving back and forth, and that we really don't have anything to show them that we're trying to clear out that area led to then what became Operation MATADOR. Although, around that time, probably even before then, there were some special opera-

<sup>2</sup> This occurred on 2 April 2005. CNN.com, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/04/02/iraq.main/>> 3 April 2005, accessed 12 August 2011.

tions raids going on north of the river. I only knew about that, because we'd have to clear airspace for them. They obviously knew there were some folks up there and were going after them, but it was very selective. Whereas there was no real presence north of the river to challenge anything that was going on up there. [54:28]

Knarr: Okay. So now you're through April. In May you had MATADOR.

Mundy: MATADOR, yeah. A couple of weeks' worth of planning went on for that. Part of my turnover with Colonel Woodbridge was figuring out if we needed to get north of the river somewhere. We had to get up there to push some Marines out to patrol, and let the folks up there know that there was still a presence. He recognized that when he had lost those LAR units that could go north of the river that really we had no presence up there, and we weren't getting a lot done. So we had talked about it. Colonel Davis was aware of that. What happened around Camp Gannon made it a lot easier to sell back up the chain that we wanted to do a deliberate operation. We needed to get out there. And so Colonel Davis pushed for that. That's how he got the Army Bridging Unit. For that operation we ended up with a LAR Company, or a company minus, but LAR Company attached. So we were a little bit more robust. We got Lima 3/25 attached. In essence he [Davis] gave me back my third Rifle Company that I was short and this other Army Bridging Unit, an ANGLICO [Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company] det that came out there with us. It was running around to help out. We probably did get an additional tank platoon, things like that. So, we got more attachments to do that operation, because there was very much a sense that we wanted to go clear that area north. And I mentioned to you the regiment employed a blocking position way out west.

Knarr: In fact, here, why don't you mark up this other map [Figure A-2]?

Mundy: As I mentioned, we rolled out and moved up to the vicinity of Ubaydi to establish that bridge. We were expecting to really clear through each one of these little towns along the river. Our suspicion was that anybody north of the river was either going to run west or they were going to run south across this bridge, because we really didn't have enough people to be in both places. This was very difficult to get to. Initially the plan was us crossing here at first light. At the same time the mobile assault platoon out of Camp Gannon was going to move along the river, because we thought that would cause less suspicion for us moving anybody out of Al Qaim. While Al Qaim was a great location to stay out of reach of the enemy, the problem was that anytime you rolled out through the desert, everybody knew you were coming because you're kicking up a big dust trail and everything.

So, they were supposed to move that mobile assault platoon down and essentially establish a blocking position south of this bridge. So, you know, that's intended to be a platoon blocking position coming out of Camp Gannon. But there was all sorts of friction involved. In essence, they established a blocking position. It was about a platoon size, as I recall, out there right on the border that was intended to stop anybody moving there. We wanted to stop anybody moving here as we came across and basically swept east to west up there.

Knarr: You had this huge escarpment up here. When you look from Gannon up, it's just a wall.

Mundy: Right. It was hard to kind of get a good feel for it until we got in there. There were some caves and things along different parts of this at the end of the operation. We went up and searched those looking for what we thought could potentially be hideouts or places where foreign fighters may have been coming in and staging. Nothing really turned up there. You know, you find a few weapons and things, but it didn't look like a whole lot of organized hiding places or anything. The morning of the operation, I knew the raid went on, although they were talking more to the RCT than to me. I was obviously rolling out there as first light. And as I described, we basically stalled right here in what turned out to be about a 24-hour delay, because we couldn't get the bridge in place [see Figure A-2, bridging operation in Ubaydi]. But the blocking position did go in as planned under control of the RCT. One of their majors with a platoon of Marines had flown in up there.

The mobile assault platoon that moved along this little dotted line, which is a dirt road that is not very passable. I had expressed a lot of concern at the time, just based on the timeline that we were moving in the dark with a platoon along a route we have not been down before. We were trying to hit a blocking position, coordinate with a blocking position here, a raid here, and in essence, kind of bottling this whole thing up all at once. [1:00:55] So, I had some concerns about that...more for the timing. I thought they'd eventually get there, but it was just the timeline we were trying to run that morning. They ended up running into more trouble, not necessarily from enemy action, but just the sheer difficulty of moving along this route with big heavy HMMWVs and being very close to the river. It was really not much more than an unimproved trail. And so that platoon never made it to this position.

There was another mobile assault platoon down still at Camp Al Qaim. I think Colonel Davis along with my XO [executive officer] made the call while we were up here, to run

them straight into that position. To be honest, I don't know if they just came up and jumped on the road and ran straight up. They probably came up from the south, zig-zagged their way in, and ran straight to that position. [See Figure A-2. They were to set up a blocking position south of the river to prevent the enemy escaping south across the bridge north of Karabilah]. Again, by that time, vehicles were moving, and the enemy may not have known where they were going, but they were alerted that something was going on. Obviously they knew there was a lot going on around them in other places. When they ran up through there, they were shot at the whole way. They were hit by a SVBIED [suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive device]. And it was a mobile assault platoon with probably a tank section at that point. I think only the two tanks. One of the tanks got knocked out of commission. It took a couple casualties up there.

If you know the story, that was Lieutenant Brian Stann [Stann's platoon set up the blocking position south of the bridge that was north of Karabilah]. I ended up putting him in for a Silver Star, and he was awarded that for his actions there over an extended period of time. He got into position. They were basically sitting right there where everybody who wanted to take a shot at him could. There were RPGs and everything. For a second lieutenant thrown into that environment, he was incredibly calm. It was more the Marines talking about him. He was on the radio, getting out of his vehicle, and running from vehicle to vehicle, checking on Marines. He just seemed calmed. I mean, ice water in his veins through the whole thing while understanding that they were over there and couldn't lend any aid, and there was not a lot left in Al Qaim. The blocking position was not intended to move anywhere from out here, so it was sitting in place. So they were really kind of hanging out there on their own for a period of time. It was pretty remarkable effort by him and the Marines that were there. But because of that, I don't believe MATADOR was near as effective as it could have been.

As I mentioned to you, when we finally got across, we gained success by learning more about New Ubaydi. We saw some developments in terms of the enemy out there—the type of defenses they had put into the city. I've heard Colonel Davis talk about it: we flushed out a lot of the enemy fighters trying to escape the fight going back east. So we had success, but it was more that we capitalized on some things that occurred in spite of what we had planned there.

By the time we got across the river and swept through these areas, we would find some positions in particular around the north side of this bridge. There were actually fighting holes dug in, almost like a little defensive perimeter around the north side of the bridge as

if they expected us to come along and check it sometime. I couldn't quite tell if they had intended to defend if we were trying to cross the bridge from the south or if those were dug hastily when they knew we were coming from the north. But, in several places, especially the closer we got to this area, we would go through parts of the towns where people would tell us, "Hey, there was somebody here, but they left. They knew you were coming and then they took off." There's obviously a bunch of these little roads. As much as we got in and sent elements up to try to cut them off, by the time we got there, there were any number of places they could have scattered to in the north. And in fact, I don't really recall the reason, but that blocking position eventually got pulled and was sent somewhere else, so when we did the final push west there was an open egress to the west also.

And so we found a lot of evidence that they had been there. Locals up there were not allowed to have telephones. The insurgents would be in the area and just say, "Hey, you can't have a phone." I think because they were afraid of them talking to some American that would then alert the guys who on occasion had raided up there. They had run into some pretty significant resistance in a couple of instances. So, it was obvious that the enemy had been in the area, but again, it was more this foreign influence. Then the local people talked about guys being there who were not from around there. They were not indicating that it happened to be somebody they knew, for example, a disgruntled Iraqi who was fighting us. But it was a foreigner or somebody like a Zarqawi who may have been an Iraqi by birth but really was operating differently with Al Qaeda. And so, that was MATADOR. It was a huge operation. It got a lot of media coverage. I had a lot of media embeds that flew out and spent time with us. But somewhat anti-climatic in terms of what occurred or what we thought we were going up there to get accomplished.

This is just a trivia thing more than anything, but there's a road just off of this bridge, on this side. You walked in through the front door here, and I don't know if you happened to catch it, but Staff Sergeant Kendall Ivy...

Knarr: Yes, I did. I read that.

Mundy: Yeah, if you noticed, he was part of Operation MATADOR. You can ask Colonel Davis about him. He had worked several months on the RCT-2 staff. He was a phenomenal Marine. [1:07:20]

Knarr: He mentioned him during the interview.

Mundy: A phenomenal Marine. We had a staff sergeant who was a part of 3/25 get killed going through New Ubaydi. Right when we got across, I think I probably met Kendall Ivy

sitting on a road up here. Somewhere we had moved across his area. He got sent out from RCT-2 to replace that staff sergeant who'd been killed. I met him, took him down there, got him situated with his platoon, and they moved out. It was only one or two days later when they were moving along a road. I was sitting within a hundred yards of him when his AAV hit a pressure plate IED and blew a hole right through the back end of the thing and set it on fire. He died right there at that spot.

Call it fate or whatever you want to call it, but I show up here as the Commanding Officer of the School of Infantry and one of the first things the staff presented to me was four nominees, former combat instructors from the School of Infantry, who we could pick from to get the building named after him. They start showing me who these Marines were. Certainly it could have been any one of them, but I looked down and one of the four was Staff Sergeant Ivy. He had been a combat instructor here at the school before heading over to RCT-2. And so I just couldn't miss the opportunity to say, "Hey, you know what? I was within the vicinity, I stood right at the back of the AAV as Marines were being pulled out, and he was one of them." What a remarkable turn of events that I could be the guy who actually gets to select the name. We invited the family. They were unbelievably supportive and patriotic to the degree that even his wife talking about, "Someday my son is coming through the School of Infantry. He's going to enlist in the Marine Corps." For a widow, considering that Staff Sergeant Ivy died, I mean, she was very supportive. So, it's great as we discuss MATADOR and significant events, that you happen to be sitting in Ivy Hall, you, know named for Staff Sergeant Ivy.



**Figure A-4. Ivy Hall, in memory of SSgt Kendall Ivy**

Knarr: So, you crossed here and you followed the north side of the river into these towns and then moved up?

Mundy: Yep. There was a report somebody wrote out of the division that made it sound as if right when we crossed, we were all in some big fire fight moving through this first town. I think that they got confused about what all the fighting was taking place in Ubaydi before we crossed.

Knarr: Now was that still taking place or did you leave some people?

Mundy: We left most of the ANGLICO. Now Colonel Scott Campbell had the ANGLICO det there. He had some of his Marines there, and they continued to get in some engagements. Then of course, the bridging unit soldiers were there. I continued to run logistics back and forth to support the rest of the operation, so there were always Marines moving around the area. But we left enough there that they couldn't be overwhelmed. There was some concern that somebody would come back and try to cut us off, but we eventually found out this bridge could hold our vehicles through a pretty heroic act. But you know trial and error. We figured that out. So, we couldn't have gotten out of there even if we had to give up the bridge, but we did end up rolling back all the way around and using the bridge to get out of there as well. So yes, we basically just moved along town to town. We found a little resistance at each point, but not anything too significant. A lot of places we'd roll in and just find the evidence that somebody had been there, but not a lot else. So, that became the end of it. We spent about a day or two kind of up in this area. We finally got to sort of the end, that town. And you mentioned the high escarpments. We sent Marines up there on foot.

Knarr: So you were up on top of the escarpments.

Mundy: Got up on top of it and had Marines walk around. Yeah, you could do it. You could move up and down them if you found the right areas. A lot of times I had my CP sitting way up on top looking down as the units were moving down below it. But eventually we sent Marines to hike along and check caves and things. Again, they'd occasionally find a few weapons, but no major cache of things. They didn't get the evidence of direct foreign fighter involvement until really Operation SPEAR later on. But, this again shows how each thing links to another: as Camp Gannon opened the door and led to MATADOR, the actions of the platoon that was sitting here, the significance of the resistance that they met. Even though we knew there were people there, it surprised us that they were really being pressured down here up until the end when it was obvious that the whole battalion was basically moving around the area. Then everything kind of quieted down. But the significance of the resistance they hit going in there told us that there was probably something to the intel-

ligence that we were seeing of foreign fighter involvement. It was particularly right there in Karabilah.

And so we followed that up with plans for SPEAR that was probably more confirmed. I sent a sniper team a couple of times in to the southern end of Karabilah...some of these houses that are a little bit different. You can get into them coming through the desert, surreptitiously moving into position. One of my sniper teams shot and killed four guys who would come out basically into this open area to do target practice. They had not just AK-47s, which were allowed, but they had RPKs and machine guns. They were pulling all sorts of weapons out of the trunk. When they got ready to leave, we killed them. So that was something that indicated that there was more presence up here. Eventually I sent another team back in with one of my air officers as a forward air controller attached to that sniper team. They were watching folks probably right up in this block here moving in and out of houses, carrying a lot of different weapons, almost like having meetings in the street and all that kind of stuff.

Knarr: They had a mosque up in that area didn't they?

Mundy: Yeah, there was one on the south end. Yeah, probably right there [south of Karabilah on the map at Figure A-2].

And then there was probably another one further up in there. Occasionally you would come across kind of a plain looking building that they would say, "That's a mosque." You'd have to look pretty carefully to find that was the one with the no-kidding minaret. You know, very much a classic mosque in the sense of the dome and things like that. But again that sniper team and forward air controller going in, again confirmed...

They were probably in those houses. They would actually move across, so they could sit on top of houses or in the upper floor of some abandoned house and look. They actually started calling in fire and air. He directed some air on some of the folks that were moving in there. They figured that they were being observed from somewhere, and they actually started moving down where they kind of figured out where they would be. So we ended up having to extract that team almost under pressure; running some of the assault platoons up there and getting them out, pulling them south. But again that was another one that we said, "Okay. There's something going on up there. We have enough evidence that's there's a real presence there that we want to go into that area." So again we got an LAR Company attached. I got Lima 3/25 back to round out the battalion. Then with my own rifle company, Kilo 3/2, Lima 3/25, and the LAR attachments, we moved up from the south and



crossed this railroad track [where the “d” is on Emerald south of Karabilah], really kind of like it was almost our staging area, right south of it and crossed over that and sent two companies abreast to just push through Karabilah.

Knarr: So you say two, one on each side of the wadi or what?

Mundy: No, we stayed west of the wadi.

Knarr: Is that called the Emerald Wadi? Is that what people then called that?

Mundy: I think so. But again, there’d be times we’d have Marines moving out south of the city, and they would get mortar fire. [1:16:44]

Basically two companies heading straight south to north. We used this road and the wadi as the limit in terms of how far east we went. And it really only covered several blocks, probably not more than a kilometer, but we cleared that area moving up through there.

Knarr: And when was that?

Mundy: Let’s see, this was SPEAR, so it must have been June. As you play this out, you can kind of see how each event leads to the next. Each one filled in some gap in our picture and told us what we were seeing. It kind of confirmed intelligence that we thought we had, and led to the next operation. So this became Operation SPEAR, a very deliberate clearing effort moving up through the town there. We had a more concerted information operations effort in this case.

We had another platoon, the mobile assault platoon that would go back up here to try to cut off an egress to the north. The two companies were moving along here, but before they really started the deliberate assault, we were broadcasting messages out to people and telling them, “Look, if you’re just a civilian, you need to move out of the area. We’re coming through. We’re looking for certain people in here, and we respect the civilians that are in here. You need to move out of the area.” And plenty of them did, so there was an exodus going on. I had heard through talking to the locals, although I never really confirmed, that there were a few of the key leaders that actually dressed as Iraqi women and got out of the area by walking out. We tried to use this later as an information operations message to show that the supposed warriors of the insurgency were dressing like women. That doesn’t play well in the culture there. But, nonetheless, there was a fairly concerted defensive effort. It was nowhere near the same built up type of defenses as we found in New Ubaydi. But nonetheless, we obviously were overrunning areas.

We found evidence eventually in the kind of headquarters area. We found papers, a computer with a big database of people that had come through, passports, big weapons stockpiles, and a school room with a chalkboard drawing out how to build IEDs. It was a class for IED building. There was a fairly significant number of finds there. There were people fighting us all along the way. Not heavy fighting, but enough that the Marines were in essence clearing house to house. I had a couple of Marines killed during that time as they moved through there. It was a deliberate, probably about seven/eight day effort to really move almost all the way up to where the platoon blocking position was.

A couple days into the operation, I want to say it was somewhere about in the middle of this, we found what we referred to as the torture house. We found it up toward the north along here. We came across this house that the Marines cleared. We found several guys in there still in handcuffs. We happened to have a very good, seasoned CNN crew with us at that time, which jumped right into the middle and was interviewing these guys. They had scars all over their bodies. There was one room in the house where they had painted the windows black [see Figure A-5]. They had a big hook in the ceiling and would obviously run these guys up, hang them upside down over a bucket of water. They would dip them in the water and then pull them up. They had a frayed electrical cord plugged into the wall that they would sit there and shock them. They had burns and marks all over their bodies. For whatever reason they were just torturing these guys. Trying to get something out of them or get them to go along with the program or something. There was very obvious foreign fighter involvement there in terms of the types of weapons we found. There were all the sorts of different makes of RPGs and different rifles. And more important were the papers that we found: passports of all sorts of different countries.



**Figures A-5. (l) Victim of a Torture House and (r) ropes to hoist victims by their feet**

There was a computer database that showed a very deliberate, almost like a check-in sheet for the Marine Corps. “You just got here today, here you get issued this, you give us that, you report to this guy for training and preparation.” So it was very significant, and it was actually very handy to have. I had a couple of the print reporters with me and a CNN crew who was reporting this stuff as it happened. And then we even took them back with all the stuff we captured before they left. We got back to Al Qaim. I had Gunner Vatali that you heard a little bit on the phone interview. He laid all this stuff out in a room probably twice this size. He gave a little lecture about the weapons, which type of weapons only come from country X and which weapons were more likely brought in by which group, like the Sudanese or something. He’s that kind of nut for all that stuff, so he knows it well enough that he could speak to each piece and give them a tour of all the stuff we got, foreign money and a variety of things, so that several reporters could see and really confirm the idea that this is not just a local Iraqi tired of the Americans being here thing. It really is the influence of Al Qaeda-sponsored foreign fighters who were coming here to be part of the Jihad against America. [1:23:25]

Knarr: Can you talk to when you first met Colonel Ahmed?

Mundy: I thought he was in several of the meetings, and I was flipping through to see if I could see him in one of those. I don’t recall having that picture, but I know I have a picture where I am with him and the rest of the ING, Iraqi National Guard, remnant that was out there. And when you see it, if I do have that picture, you’ll recognize that what we were calling the ING was a pretty rag tag group [see Figure A-6].



**Figure A-6. Iraqi National Guard, 7 June 2005**

Colonel Ahmed was recognized somewhat as a figurehead, because they would have him at the meetings that I would go to initially when I went out with Colonel Woodbridge and did the turnover. I went to the first couple of meetings and you really had the Mayor of Al Qaim there. When he was there, Colonel Ahmed would be there. He was a big talker. I didn't know half of what he was saying. My impression was that he wants to be heard, he wants to look important, and he wants to talk about a lot of things. I had several meetings with him. I even had him come to Al Qaim and brought him right to the headquarters one time. I sat and had a meeting with him there. I tried to win him over in a lot of ways to show respect. You know, "You're a Colonel, I'm a Colonel. That's great, we'll work like partners." But the reality was he lived in Husaybah on the southeast corner of Husaybah. I had no way of verifying it, because he was at the farthest point away from my Marines that were up there, but he would always claim that he had gotten in a fight with the insurgents. That they had shot up his house and that he had killed five of them or something. It was always a great story to go along with whatever he was trying to tell me. It was usually his segue into asking for something—"Hey, if you'd only give me radios, and then the helicopters fly in support of me." That just wasn't going to happen. I didn't know really what his motives were, and it was hard to tell. There was nothing tangible that existed of the Iraqi National Guard other than him and a few guys in uniform who rode around with him. So, he was helpful to meet with, but not really for more than that. I never felt like bringing the Iraqi National Guard along with us on some operation. There weren't enough of them. There really wasn't a presence up there. They were about the only presence of any kind of security force at that time.

I think I mentioned to you, I would have to fill out every month trying to talk about how things were improving in the area in terms of governance and security forces. And of course in other areas of Iraq we were standing up police forces. There were Army units. There were all sorts of things going on that everybody else would be checking off saying, "We're making X percent progress in the development of the Army or the police or something." I think people thought I was being overly pessimistic because mine would always come back all red, zero. We have no police. They'd say, "Hold on. Are you telling me there's nothing out there?" And I'd have to say, "Yeah, I'm pretty much telling you there is nothing out here of significance." So, he was there the whole time I was there.

When we finally went to dismantle the Iraqi National Guard, I want to say that was probably July or August timeframe. They were incorporated, and they were supposed to sign on to be part of the Iraqi Army. They were sent back to train. It was part of the deliberate ef-

fort to build the Iraqi Army, which was all going in the right direction. But when I finally set up the meeting with him and his people, he told me, “They will all be here. My force will be assembled, and we’ll turn in the excess weapons.” We showed up and it was a really humble compound with just trash everywhere, a couple offices that obviously he occupied, but no real training facility. Most of the guys there were just dressed in whatever they happened to have. A handful of them had something that looked like pieces of uniforms. But beyond him and a few other leaders, there really wasn’t much. Even their weapons were in really poor state of maintenance. So that, again...

Knarr: How many people were there?

Mundy: We probably signed up close to 50 or something. [1:29:02] Yeah, I mean there was a group. He was somewhat a leader in the community. But again, it was hard to tell whether he went around and said, “By the way, next week if you’re looking for a job, come with me. We’ll all sign up to be a part of the Army.” And whether any of these guys had been part of what really was the Iraqi National Guard or not was hard to tell, because most of them didn’t look like they had any kind of training or uniform or any kind of designation.

Knarr: What happened to these guys then?

Mundy: They all signed on the dotted line. We closed down that little compound, moved them out, took all the weapons, and sent them back east along with all these guys to become part of the Iraqi Army as some part of the unit.

Knarr: Yeah, I’ve definitely got a picture of Colonel Ahmed with the Desert Protectors, because we did an interview with him. I’m just curious if it’s the same guy. [Later it turned out that later it wasn’t.]

Mundy: He wasn’t a real presence in terms of real security while I was out there. But he obviously was somebody who was important enough. The other locals—whether it was businessmen or something—knew who he was and recognized him for being some kind of military presence, but there was no Iraqi National Guard operating anywhere in any of these towns so that I had a sense of, “Oh, okay I can go to that part of town because I know there’s Iraqi National Guard standing on the corners.” They were in essence nonexistent except for the stories he told me about all the fighting he was doing on my behalf. But that was never coordinated. I never heard any of the locals talk about it. I mean, there was nothing. No evidence of it that I could find and certainly the insurgents seemed to be running at will wherever they wanted. We would find people occasionally come up on an intersection on one of the patrols and there would be four or five locals who had

been executed and left there to send a message...you know, shot through the eyes and things like that. I mean just these really gruesome things and there was no security other than us that would come up on that and find it and deal with it. So, I really believe for whatever he was, it was pretty nonexistent during that time.

Knarr: So then July and August, because you left in September. So you did SPEAR in June, then what happened during the rest of your time? [1:32:14]

Mundy: We continued to do pretty much what we did all the time. These were the major operations for the battalion. We were always out operating and doing raids and things. We did local patrolling. We went down and did somewhat of a deliberate operation in this...I don't know if it shows up on the map. I am trying to remember what we called it. It was an old pumping station or something. It was called something like T-1 as a matter of fact. If they're using the same designation it's probably out here. It was basically on the same long distance road that the Marine Combat Logistics Regiment Units would have to move to supply us. It was a pretty hazardous route, but they'd come along here. Along the way, there was this area called T-1. And so we did some operations. Again, some indication that maybe there was some presence down there, because of them hitting a lot of mines and IEDs moving up always in that vicinity. It kind of made sense. You know, somebody is living in a certain area and wants to get paid for putting in mines...obviously they're operating in the vicinity of where they live. And so we went down and cleared that town although there was no real fighting.

We moved into the area, kind of cordoned it off, moved through it, and searched. It was a very interesting place. I would love to know the history. We actually walked into a very much British Officer's Club for lack of a better term. It still looked like stewards were working the dining room. Now, they were working for some guys who were running the pumping station. It was Iraqi workers at the time. But you walked in and there was a huge regulation size billiards table, a bar in the back, and a huge dining room. It looked like formal stuff. It was just kind of odd way out in the middle of nowhere!

But anyway, we would do things like that which were a little bit bigger operation, but by and large, it was just the companies operating and us following intel and finding out that, "Hey, we think we've got a guy located either in Husaybah or in one of these towns." And again, those were typically night raids where it would be maybe one platoon. We'd send them in, and we cordoned off an area. We'd run in and search houses, capture guys, bring them back as detainees, and question them. A lot of times they'd be released.

They'd feed us more information. It would lead to something else and you just continued to do that. So, we continued trying, you know, run our own targets on who we knew were important people potentially moving through the area or if we got high value targets fed down from the RCT. So it was what I considered normal operations—more Civil Military stuff and then tried to continue to interact with the locals out there and continue to do that. But, that was probably it for major operations.

You know about when 3/25 suffered a lot of casualties back over in the Hit and Haditha area we did what we called Operation QUICK STRIKE. That was in August. It was one of the last things we did there. But QUICK STRIKE really was because of them taking some fairly significant hits in terms of a sniper team that was wiped out. And then an AAV, a bunch of Marines got killed. So they were kind of sitting back on their heels. The Regiment asked, "Hey, you know, we want to try and do something again to establish presence and really sweep through that area. We want to bring you over to sweep through Hadithah while they block one side of the river or something."

At that point I got Lima 3/2 back from Al Asad. They were replaced by a unit. It was late enough in the deployment that they actually returned to me about a week before this and so that was an operation they got to go on. But, I mean, you can look at the distance. We loaded up and took off in a convoy driving out across the open desert for pretty much the better part of a day. We moved into the town and patrolled. Marines ran into things and a few IEDs. They had a few little firefights, and so there was some resistance there. There was obviously an enemy presence, because they had deliberately targeted the sniper team. They had deliberately gone after the Marines in the AAVs, and so clearly there was an enemy there. But again, you know, you roll across the desert. You're kind of sending them a signal that you're coming. That was a very hard city to cordon off completely. And so we moved in and searched through there. We'd find a few things. It was a long operation. We didn't have anything like the finds we had as part of Operation SPEAR. We moved back out west. Right before we left we began to see cooperation with the locals. It was literally, leading up to and maybe even including part of the turnover with 3/6. It's funny because it happened real late. And it was happening with the RCT directly involved, because of their contacts and talking to guys on the ground. And, again, through dealing with Frank Diorio, India Company up around Husaybah.

In the month or two prior to us leaving, we had seen evidence of insurgents moving in toward India Company, attacking Camp Gannon and actually being cut off by local forces behind them. Again, we did not really coordinate it. But they knew enough to say, "Ok,

when the Marines are shooting at them this way, we can catch them on the tail end and basically sandwich these guys.” And so we were seeing cooperation with the locals, whether deliberately planned or not. It was as if we were talking to them and telling them, “Hey, now’s the time to go.” They obviously recognized that, “Hey, we’re tired of this foreign fighter influence, and we’re going to do something about it.” That was where I really think that the way Frank conducted the business up there mattered. And the Marines were very professional and disciplined in how they did things. They proved to the people that, “We’re a better option than the insurgents” who would shoot you through the head and leave you lying on a street corner somewhere if they didn’t like you. We’d find beheadings and all sorts of crazy stuff going on. So, the last few nights before we really packed up and moved out of there, that was when that big fight busted out in Husaybah proper. India Company was involved. I had a sniper team that moved south of the city. It was watching insurgents taking a lot of different weapons in and out of the train station. [1:40:59]

But that’s the train station in Husaybah, which for a long time we had thought was where some bad things were happening, so we put a sniper team down south of the city. We moved them out around where they could observe. And in coordination with, and, again, Frank will remember the name, you may have mentioned him, but he was one of the leaders. The guy I keep referring to as Falzi. That’s the name that it seemed like Frank was always using. Who he exactly was, I don’t know, but he also seemed to have an ability as I recall being able to talk straight to Colonel Davis almost. He was basically in contact with key leaders, coordinating with them and everything.

The snipers would see guys going in here. We bombed the train station when we knew they were all on the train there. Falzi and others would call Frank and say, “Hey they just moved into this hotel and this block.” And we’d find it, and we’d send the air in there, you know, confirming things, talking back and forth. There was a very well-coordinated effort between a company commander talking to me, talking to the Regiment, getting the assets and continue to run this. It was an odd kind of fight, because we were dealing with a local guy. I was sitting in my CP [command post] looking at all this through a down link, the Rover Link, plotting targets, talking to pilots, and all this kind of stuff. It was kind of a surreal experience, but nonetheless, getting intel from the ground that, “Hey, we’ve got these guys going here. We’ve got them there.” At that point I think we all felt like these folks are in it with us. And if they’re telling us that’s where they went, then we believe them. And of course we’re doing the normal checks to make sure that building is not right next to a school or a mosque or something, your normal collateral damage as-



essment. [1:43:40] But where we thought it was valid, and where we had targets, we were prosecuting them. And so we were doing some good work there.

That was really probably the swan song for me. The hand off with Dale and heading back to Al Asad, and I was done. And I mentioned to you that I had limited forces—limited in terms of what I could do, in terms of presence in a lot of areas. But while that was somewhat frustrating, I also understood that it was part of the overall campaign. And I think Dale, in essence, was able to be the next phase of the campaign as things were pretty well settled as much as they could be east, that deliberate focus. I feel like 3/2 brought to light a bunch of things that set the stage for the next phase, which meant establishing the Iraqi Army. I told you when you walked in we had just started building the camp to establish the no kidding Iraqi Army presence out west.

Dale showed up with a full battalion, all rifle companies—not like me always operating with one short. As you mentioned Colonel Davis went from a pretty insignificant force covering a humongous area to a significant force in that next six months. So I think it was the recognition that it's time to go west and really establish a presence out there. It was effective. I mean, it worked.

Knarr: From 15 February to 15 September, he called it his first semester. I think he called it that because as he indicated, he had a discretionary company out of the dam and that's all he had to use to move around and have a regimental operation.

Mundy: Right.

Knarr: But then the second semester was 15 September until he left I think it was February/March. He called that second semester, because then he got the forces to be able to really do something.

Mundy: Right! Yeah, occasionally he would take either a major out of the S3 shop, US, or occasionally the British...

Knarr: The British guy—that's right!

Mundy: And then organize sort of a reinforced platoon or company or something, and they'd go out and do little sweeps along the river in different areas. And so that was right. But, you know, his perspective was very much like mine. You've been around Alford enough. He's great. He can look at something and immediately say, "This is what we ought to be doing here." He was talking about, "I'm going to set up a position here, and I'll do that here" and it all made perfect sense. But I had nowhere near... [1:46:46]

Knarr: But you needed people!

Mundy: Yeah, you need the people to do it. Especially with the Iraqis. That was the value, again, of something like QUICK STRIKE where there wasn't a lot happening. The real value was I got to see for the first time the value of having an Iraqi Army with us. It was when we had a couple of Green Beret officers along with a regular Iraqi Army company that actually worked right along with us. We joined them when we got there. It showed how effective you could be with the Iraqi Forces being integrated. When you've got a guy who is a local, it is very obvious when something doesn't look right. The American would have completely missed it, because he's just not used to looking at it. And so I could see how they would be very effective working out here, but it just didn't materialize while we were there. But then it wasn't really until QUICK STRIKE that we had a full company moving along with us. You could kind of see the value of that. But even then that didn't really translate into anything we did out in my area really till 3/6 and Dale got there.

Knarr: That's pretty good. I appreciate you taking the time to do this.

[Colonel Mundy's discussion of the Camp Gannon video recorded separately]

17 March 2012

Subject: Interview with Major Frank Diorio, USMC, Former Commander, India Company, 3/2 Marines

Major Diorio commanded India Company, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines (3/2 Marines) at Camp Gannon from March 2005 until August 2005, in Al Qaim, an outpost next to the Syrian border.

He describes events during that deployment; in particular about an 11 April 2005 insurgent attack on Camp Gannon where the insurgents employed a Fire Truck laden with explosives to penetrate the perimeter of the Camp and also about the complex attacks that followed.



Major Diorio was interviewed at his office at Camp Pendleton, California, on 8 February 2011 by MajGen Tom Jones, USMC, Retired.

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MajGen Tom Jones, USMC, Retired: Please start by talking about the pre-deployment training program [PTP], how you prepared, what you anticipated, how it unfolded, and then walk me into Iraq and the turnover, when you took over from 1/7, and then we'll go on from there.

Major Frank Diorio, USMC: The Company had the benefit of just having gotten back from Djibouti. We deployed to Djibouti as security forces at Camp Lemonier. So we had originally had that as a foundation of security procedures, working with those nation forces, and some basic tenets of cooperative-type planning.

We came back from there, and then we started into the PTP, which, during the Spring/Summer of 2004, was still coming together. We were in the middle of still preparing conventionally in kinetic operations. Then there was a host of new training procedures, TTPs [tactics, techniques, procedures] on non-kinetic operations, so we were trying to juggle everything at once. The battalion started their PTP, and we wound up going to March Air Force Base to do the COIN [counterinsurgency] training that they had at the time, coordinated with the training at 29 Palms. The training there was valuable in that it made the leaders of the company realize that they were going to have to be good at a lot of different things, but we can't forget about being good at the basics. So we focused on the basics of discipline. We focused on continuing with the basic training of be-

ing good at the fundamentals. And then from there, we used that discipline to talk about other things, to talk about COIN, to talk about non-kinetic type things. But we always tied it to the basics. We never let one thing separate the other. I think that was important. And at the same time, it really gave our squad leaders, our NCOs [non-commissioned officers], a reality check that they were going to be expected to do things that were perhaps traditionally outside of their normal job description, but probably things that the Marine Corps has been doing for hundreds of years, but it was just outside of what they taught at SOI [School of Infantry] or elsewhere.

We got back in August of 2004. And we headed to our training at March Air Force Base in January, so we really only had about four months.

Jones: When you say “back,” do you mean back from Djibouti?

Diorio: Yes, back from Djibouti.

Jones: You were company commander in Djibouti?

Diorio: Yes, sir. So the training at March Air Force Base was new. We tied that and the training at 29 Palms together. They brought in some outside instructors from the United Kingdom to talk about their experiences in Northern Ireland with satellite patrolling and concepts that were new to us. The important take-away from that was that it showed us that it was okay to learn different tactics, techniques, and procedures, but we had to appreciate how to use them in the context. So we couldn't take what we were being taught that worked in Northern Ireland and expect that to work in Al Anbar. I think that was something that we learned early on. And we continued to talk about it: avoid vignettes, avoid clichés, and avoid absolutes. After talking to a lot of guys, none of those really applied in theatre. You had to make sure the context was right or else you would go down a path that was not contextually correct. Even though we were getting different types of training in there, we always made sure that afterwards we got the Marines together. We said, “Okay, what is the context of this? What are the second- and third-order effects of not understanding the context?” These were discussions that we were having with Lance Corporals and Corporals. And then they went to talk about it with their Privates and PFCs [Private First Class], so we thought that was a valuable opportunity.

The training was good, even the training that was new. And March Air Force Base, it was still valuable to get a company isolated and realize that they were going to have to operate at a level perhaps not normally directly supported by the battalion or if there was support from the battalion, it's not as easy as going to the building or office next to you.

You are going to be separated by distance and time. And you are going to be expected to operate independently for long periods of time. So it's all very valuable training, but it can't prepare you for everything. But it did prepare us to realize that we had to learn how to think. It did prepare us to learn that there was going to be the unexpected there, and in that way, it was very valuable. As a company, we got to go out and form a unity and some team building. And that way, when we left, we were confident that at the very least, we trusted each other.

Jones: I remember from listening to Colonel Mundy's interview, and he mentioned that in his study while you guys were preparing, at RCAX [Revised Combined Arms Exercise] and at March, that he was seeing more kinetic action required than what was being taught. What's your perspective on that as far as were you anticipating more COIN actions or were you expecting more of what Col Mundy was saying, "You are going to have more of a fight on your hands."

Diorio: Yes sir. I had been talking with 1/7's company commander at the time, Captain Nelson, and getting what they were dealing with. And basically they were dealing with a lot of intense fighting for a short period of time followed by long durations of preparing for the next operation. Because in Al Qaim the atmosphere was that there was no government control at all. There were no police to work with, and there was no Army to work with. There was no National Guard to work with. Everything was disbanded. They were still figuring things out east of us where the capital was, so there really was no partnering going on. So it was still very kinetic whenever the Marines went outside of the firm base.

At the same time, they were still trying to figure out a way to crack that open. And so in our training, we definitely started with the conventional. And a lot of the operations, I remember very often, Col Mundy pulling us back in, especially at March Air Force Base. He was talking about appreciating the second- and third-order effects of the kinetic operation and not discounting them. But we definitely started there and when the Marines left, they were definitely prepared for kinetic operations. And I would say that most of the counterinsurgent-type things that we learned, we learned in step when we got there.

Jones: Talk to me now about any final wrap up points of your PTP, your turnover with the company from 1/7, and what your initial reactions were when you got there. Particularly what were the surprises that you had with things that you did not prepare for?

Diorio: Well, we got our hands wrapped around the atmosphere of the area. When we got there, as we were preparing to take our convoy to Camp Gannon, it was interesting the

reaction of those people at Al Asad that I didn't even know when they found out we were going to Camp Gannon.

Diorio: The reaction of people at Al Asad that I didn't even know, when they found out we were going to Camp Gannon, was interesting. It was almost like they were saying good-bye. They were coming up saying, "It's the Wild West out there and good luck!" It was almost a feeling as if they'd realized that going out there was going to be tough. In a city of about 100,000 you had 300 Marines with the job of creating a presence and making gains there. So, when we left we weren't sure what to be prepared for. It was very quiet the night before. The Marines were in the barracks getting ready for our convoy out to Camp Gannon. You could tell the Marines were nervous. I was nervous; I wasn't sure what to expect. The ride out there itself was known to be very dangerous through the desert. The roads to the city were a no-go. They were not under Coalition control, and they were heavily IED'd [improvised explosive devices]. 1/7 had figured out a TTP that they could go around the city; it took time. The convoy of 15–20 kilometers took almost six hours, but it was the safest way there.

We arrived at Camp Gannon. I remember seeing Baker Company 1/7 looking at my Marines [India/3/2] as if they were far ahead of [far more experienced than] my company. They had that look that they were sure of themselves. They knew how to read the atmosphere, and they should have. They had been there seven months. I just remember feeling that those guys were good and that they knew the area.

Jones: Had their deployment been a pretty rough deployment?

Diorio: Yes sir. They had turned over with 3/7, which basically turned over with the Army unit out there. [At the end of the transcript is a table that reflects the various battalions that rotated into the Al Qaim area.]

Jones: And Capt Gannon was [killed] with 3/7?

Diorio: Capt Gannon was [killed] with 3/7. Corporal Dunham, Medal of Honor winner, was killed out there.<sup>1</sup> His Company Commander, Major Gibson....It was all kinetic. They turned over with an Army unit who had been sent out there in 2003 with the invasion, with the task of invading. Basically, looking on a map, [with the mission of], "You are

<sup>1</sup> Corporal Jason Dunham died on 22 April 2004, covering the blast of a hand grenade to save the lives of his fellow Marines. He was a rifle squad leader for K Company 3/7 Marines. US Army Center of Military History website, <[www.history.army.mil/html/moh/iraq.html](http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/iraq.html)> accessed 6 Aug 2011.

going to control the borders.” Well, Husaybah was a point of entry. You can look at a map and say “We need to control this,” so their task out there was still in line with the procedures of the invasion. It was very kinetic, which created atmospheric issues later on. And 3/7 fell in on that. They wound up in what they call the Battle of Husaybah. Then they turned over with 1/7, who began to morph their TTPs based on the after actions [reports], but 3/7 had taken a lot of casualties. In the company out at Camp Gannon, there were well over 60 percent casualties at that time. And then Baker Company 1/7 took over. They had initially started out the same way. They were taking heavy casualties. They morphed some of their TTPs. They went to totally mounted operations, which were very successful for a long time. Then towards the end, the enemy morphed their TTPs. They started taking quite a few casualties and mounted their CAT Team. They found out they could get into the city, but they couldn’t get out.

Jones: Casualties from IEDs or RPGs [rocket propelled grenades] or what?

Diorio: Direct fire fights. And some IEDs certainly, but the city was considered a grid, 75 blocks by 50 blocks. And Camp Gannon was on a northwest corner of the city. So anytime you [the Marines] had to go into the city to do anything, it was not very hard for the enemy to figure out where you had to go to get back. They found out that they could get to their objective fine. They achieved surprise, but once they were there, it was very easy for the enemy to figure out the route they were coming back and headed them off. So they took a lot of casualties ex-filtrating from their objective. And that’s really where it was when I took over. There were no government agencies to work with at the time. It was the locals who had joined the foreign insurgency and the foreign fighters who assisted the local insurgency, and the Marines. [04:25]

Jones: How long was your turn over with Andy?

Diorio: It was about 10 days.

Jones: And tell me about what connections Andy had developed, if any, in the community.

Diorio: I know he had initially worked some sources, and their HET [human exploitation team] had worked some sources and they turned over one source to us that was valuable. She was referred to as the East End Lady.

Jones: She was developed under Andy’s watch?

Diorio: Yes, sir, initially. Her husband was killed. He was a border policeman who was killed by the local insurgents, so she hated them for that reason. She wound up initially work-

ing with the locals. We utilized her in a different way. We found another source that was valuable. But she was very valuable, and Andy turned that over to me.

Andy was a company commander who had a good control of his company. What I learned from him was that it was a lonely position being a company commander in an isolated position. You have to be willing to make those decisions. And if you're not willing to make those decisions, you don't belong there. And Andy had no problem doing that. I learned that very quickly from him. I also learned that he had the best understanding of his area than anybody else, as he should have. So even from an intelligence perspective, the company commander in an isolated position ultimately had to be the company intelligence officer. It didn't mean he didn't have his staff. It didn't mean he wasn't allowing others to do collections and synthesis, but he had to be the one, ultimately, to say what that information meant to the area.

Jones: This was maybe a year and a half before we got into the CLIC, Company Level Intelligence Cells, but what did Andy have that you learned from your turn over? You're talking about Andy being kind of his own Intel cell, but did he have the other outside assets? You mentioned a HET.

Diorio: No, he didn't, sir. He didn't. What Andy had was an incredible work ethic. He poured over INTSUMs [intelligence summaries]. He read them from months prior. I learned that before I left. That's one of the things I did before I left [for Iraq]. I gathered a year's worth of INTSUMs, and I read them. So, even before 3/7 got there, I learned what the Army was doing and what possible effects they may have. Then when I arrived, I watched Andy with piles and piles of INTSUMs that he would go through personally. No one else could appreciate the value of that information more than the man who understood his borders, the atmospherics, his Marines and what they were doing in all the operations. So I learned that from him very quickly. I benefitted from it.

Jones: At that particular time, I was still on active duty and we were having a lot of difficulty actually forecasting where battalions were going to be located in Iraq. But you suggest that you knew well in advance that you were going to be replacing 1/7.

Diorio: Yes, sir. I had enough time. I had about six weeks. And that was enough time to get into the vault and start reading. But it really played a major part later on down the road as far as appreciating that I had to be the final arbiter of what the value of the intel was. So even if other people were collecting, I needed to have information—what higher [headquarters] was reading and what the Marines underneath me were collecting—so I could



synthesize and see what it meant to us. I got that from Andy. Andy and I talked many nights of what he would do if he was staying. As a new set of eyes on the situation, I talked about, "What about this? What about this?" And he said, "Yeah, if I was staying, that might work."

I learned two things right away. Perception is greater than reality in a counterinsurgency fight. What the people thought was happening was more important than what was really happening.

The other thing was presence. I had to get my hands wrapped around this presence idea, because that was the word at the time. And Andy was struggling with it and trying to explain how presence is achieved in a town of 100,000 people with 300 Marines in a grid system of thousands of blocks. So that was what I fell in on. And Andy and I talked about that a lot and how to have presence.

So from there, that's where our operations really started once Andy left and we took over. We picked up where Andy left off, to include, in a very fundamental way, the incoming mortars. They were taking incoming mortars twice a day during the time they were there. We fell in on that; we were taking mortars into the compound twice a day. He talked to me about some of the struggles he was having with his perimeters, rules of engagement, and what he thought the enemy was doing. He passed it on to me as well, and we were able to manipulate that later on. So after 10 days, they rolled out. I think Andy would have stayed. He had a lot invested there. He's a thinker, but he's also a doer. He turned it over to me, and I contribute the success that we had directly to Baker Company. [10:01]

Jones: You mentioned the East End Lady. What other sources did you get from Andy? How quickly were you able to actually develop an intel database?

Diorio: The East End Lady was really it, sir. We didn't appreciate really what she meant to us at the time. She was just someone who would call in from time to time. There was no interaction going on, very little to build on. It was mostly interaction that she would give the Marines to protect them from things. It wasn't so much actionable as far as trying to get a foot in the door with the locals. We would utilize that later on. But we really didn't appreciate her value until later. And then what Andy gave me, though, was he didn't throw anything out. And I fell in on his office with files and files and files of INTSUMs that he kept. I got his synthesis and what he thought—another company commander's perspective. What I realized was no one can really appreciate what you were dealing with every day except the other guy who had been through that situation. And so when

Andy talked to me about what he thought and what he synthesized, I took that from him. Then the thousands and thousands of pages he went through, now had context to me. I would go through those. And then when I looked at new intelligence, I would always have that foundation of appreciating what was the value in it beyond what was directly in the paper. So that was the basics of it.

Jones: Were you able to build your own approach to building intelligence to augment these INTSUMs?

Diorio: No sir. At the time, one of the best things we were able to do was to set the pace. There was nothing coming in that required immediate action. Everything that was actionable, 1/7 had acted on. The last day that they were in the seat, we got some actionable intelligence. They executed that operation, and we went with them. So it was a left seat/right seat raid that we did. And that was the last actionable piece of intelligence they had, and they executed it until the last day. We went with them. That was a good left seat/right seat operation. Then after that there was nothing more. So we got to build our own products, our own collection, and we set our own pace. We took what was going on at the time, and we didn't try to change anything. 1/7 was not doing any dismounted patrolling when we turned over. It was all mounted. And again, the atmospherics supported it. The units were going out, taking casualties, and trying to get some information, but because it was impossible to maintain a presence there with the amount of people they had, they were giving up the space they gained the moment they left the area.

One of the things we first started on when we took over was figuring out how to achieve presence without physically standing on a street corner. One of the things that we had decided was we wanted to take a look at the area of the city that was most like a magnet. When people came in from outside the area where did they come to congregate, where did they come to talk, where did they come to plan? And that was Market Street, and that ran the length of Husaybah, approximately 100 blocks the length of Husaybah. And it was due east of our position. We could look down it; however, we never went down it, and 1/7 had not gone down it in months. But it was also at the north end of the city and north of the city was a huge field, probably 100 acres, 150 acres and then the Euphrates was north of that. One of the things that 1/7 had done, was they sort of appreciated that you could have presence by not standing on a corner if you could maintain observation of it. If you could control it with fires. It didn't mean you owned it physically, but you could inflict your will upon it. Maybe you limit their movement. Maybe you can see places they didn't think you could see.

So what they had there was a little house, a one-story house in that field, just north of the city that overlooked parts of Market Street. What they learned real quick was it messed with the enemy. The enemy spent a lot of effort to try to blow that thing up, because with a fire team, from that position, they could overlook the main area market place where the insurgents usually tried to infiltrate to attack Camp Gannon. So you can kind of get a jump on them if you saw some sort of activity that was beyond normal. And so they steered their kinetic operations against this one-story house. The Marines were in a brick building, so quite often they survived the attacks. They were usually getting attacked every day by small arms, RPGs. And they [1/7] were having effects against it to where they [the enemy] had to expose themselves to try to attack it.

One day there was a fog. Probably about a month before we took over, there was a heavy fog. They pulled a VBIED [vehicle-borne improvised explosive device] that they had been saving. They felt like this little house was enough of a valued asset to use that VBIED and take it down. And they did. They used the fog. They rolled in from the Euphrates, came south, and they blew it up. They wounded some Marines, but they lived. And then they planted a flag on top of it basically saying, "We did this, and we own it." And so it was there when we turned over. There were some indications and warning that they'd planted IEDs in the house, and they were expecting the Marines to go in there to take it down. But Andy didn't bite.

But that flag bothered the Marines. They had to look at it every day. So one of the things Andy and I talked about was rebuilding it. What about bigger building with a bigger position, so you can overlook more streets and more areas? And this goes back to the idea that perception is reality. One of the things that Andy turned over to me was that the rhetoric in town was that Husaybah was going to be the next Fallujah.

So Andy left. We went ahead and said, "Okay, well they destroyed this. In the American way, we're going to build it bigger, and we're going to build it stronger. We're going to make sure that they can't destroy it." One of the first things I did was I got approval from Colonel Mundy, because I wanted to rebuild it as squad-sized position with automatic weapons and an area for vehicles. Two stories for a squad, and you could overlook about 20 streets over Market Place. He approved it.

Jones: So it was basically a combat outpost? [17:03]

Diorio: It was a combat outpost. It was all done by hand. It was done by HESCOs [barriers] and plywood. We started working at night only. We put it 350 meters from the edge of

the city on purpose. That was where we felt like they [the insurgents] would have a good chance of having their effects against it. So it was not quite max-effective range of their weapons systems, but close enough that they would probably try to expose themselves to try to hit it. So we did it. It took the better part of three weeks by hand. I'm going to say the better part of 300 HESCOs, plywood, tens of thousands pounds of dirt, and Marines built it by hand. Every day we were building it, and we were taking fire. We were taking mortars everyday into the compound. We were still taking small fire fights at night. The division sent a platoon of tanks to help support in the building.

One of the most real moments of my time out there as a captain was when I sent off the first two tanks and didn't appreciate the fact that even a mile south the Euphrates, the ground was very soft. They called me about two hours later to tell me they were stuck. They called me just about the same time that the other two tanks were going out there to replace them, to give them a break to come back in. By the time we were off the radio, I got another phone call that all four were stuck. So I was facing the dilemma of going back to the division telling them I've got four of their most precious assets stuck in the Euphrates. The message came back very quickly, "You better dig them out."

So in the mean time of attempting to dig them out, the D-9 was sent out there and got stuck. The D-7 went out there and got stuck. It was a moment I won't forget because then I had to call back and let them know that two more precious assets got stuck. The Marines looked and said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "We're going to dig them out." The vehicles were stuck, and they started taking mortars and fire during the day. We started getting indications and warning that the insurgents thought the Marines were crazy because they wouldn't move. What they didn't know was that they couldn't. But the Marines were fine. They were inside their hardened positions. They were inside the vehicles. The mortars weren't having any effects, and the small arms weren't having any effects.

What this did, though, was fed the rhetoric that this was the next Fallujah. We didn't appreciate this at the time; we didn't know this. As we were building this position, we started seeing a large influx of people coming into the city. This was now May 2004. Fallujah was in November 2004. A lot of the people who survived Fallujah had come west to rest and refit. So they were not too far from Al Qaim. The rhetoric that this was the next Fallujah brought them all in as we were building. We really had no idea at the time.

So we continued to build. That night we went out, and we dug out all the vehicles. The vehicles came out. The very next morning we received two rounds of incoming mortar

fire. To us, at the time, that was very basic. We received mortar fire every day. I just got in. I remember we were out that night. We got back in about 0400 in the morning. I probably went to bed around 0630 that morning, just after I went down and did the After Action and the Leader's After Action. All the Marines out there were working on the position, the position wasn't done yet.

We took two rounds of incoming mortar. At that point, we had been taking mortars for about six weeks. I could tell that those landed outside the base in Syria, because it was my northwestern most wall and then Syria was on the other side. So, part of me wanted to stay, "Well it's Syria. It's two rounds. We were very well used to that." So I got back out and went into the COC [command operations center]. I said, "Okay, let's find out where the points of origin are. Let's call back and report them and start working counter-mortar fires if we can do that." Probably about five minutes into counter-mortar drill, the first explosion knocked everyone off their feet; it rocked us. I didn't know what it was. I was inside a building. It was loud. The roof picked up off its foundation. You could see sunlight between the top of the brick wall and the foundation. It was big, and I thought we were taking direct hits from mortars. I thought they were pretty big for mortars, even a direct hit. So, I called that back to headquarters, that the CP [command post] was taking direct hits. And the radios were chattering, but we couldn't hear exactly what was being said. We started to hear a lot of gun fire coming in and out. About two minutes later, there was a larger explosion. This one completely knocked everyone that was standing on the base to the ground. And between all that we can hear a Marine over the radio start yelling, "Fire truck!"

Jones: This was the fire truck. So this was about two months into your deployment then?

Diorio: This was seven weeks into the deployment, [22:48] and it was while we were building the big combat outpost.

Jones: So basically the combat outpost was the magnet that drew people out?

Diorio: No, they did not know we were building the combat outpost. The tanks were on the north edge of the city, right on the berm. They thought it was preparation for an assault in the city. And when they saw the D-9s and the roads that we were building to get out there, they saw all the tanks, they thought we were going to assault the city.

So that was the fire truck. The interesting thing about the fire truck is when I flew into Al Asad initially on my way out to Camp Gannon, we stopped in Al Asad. I stopped in the COC to track what was going on in our area to get more up-to-date information. At the

time I was there, a report came in about this fire truck that was loaded with explosives. This was February 2005. And a reconnaissance unit had found it hundreds of kilometers to our east. They found that this was a fire truck with several thousand pounds of explosives on it. They were looking to detonate it. There had always been discussion about it being out there. The problem was it was parked in a residential area and the EOD [explosive ordinance disposal] said if we blow it in place, it will destroy a large swath of the city. So at the time they weren't able to get the green light to go do that and for good reason. But I remember as I left I said, "That thing's going to wind up in someone's position." So, I had forgotten about it until the moment I heard someone yell, "Fire truck!" over the radio. And so as soon as I heard that, my heart sunk. I heard the explosion. I thought that it was a direct hit on my CP; that's how big it was. When I found out where it was, I thought I'd lost about 150 Marines. I thought my flanks were exposed.

Jones: You didn't actually lose any Marines at that time at all though did you? [24:54]

Diorio: We found out we didn't lose any. So the attack on the base consisted of three SVBIEDs [suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive device]. The first SVBIED was a van. They had a large tanker truck that they welded a dozer onto the front that they used to push our obstacle plan out of the way. We had an 18-wheel vehicle interlocking with other vehicles [set up as obstacles]. It was very ad hoc, but, you know, we didn't think anything was going to move that. With the dozer on the front of that vehicle they pushed the 18 wheeler out of the way. They pushed the other trucks out of the way. They pushed all the wire and all the HESCOs out of the way and created a hole. The first van went through. It made a right and attacked my platoon position. The next was a larger truck. It made a left and went to my CP. And the fire truck was still several hundred meters behind. So the first explosion I felt was simultaneous...the van and the truck were simultaneous. And then the [fire] truck was about 150 meters from my CP.

Jones: They couldn't get into your CP, though?

Diorio: PFC Butler kept them away from the CP. The fire truck followed behind that. PFC Butler was in the tower position. Where they were driving to, if they had gotten past the tower, my CP was right there. And PFC Butler was standing his post. When he saw the first truck come, he had started engaging with his 5.56 [millimeter NATO round used in the M16 rifle and the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon]. They had reinforced the windshields with three inch bullet proof glass. They reinforced the wheels—covered the wheels to make them bullet proof as well. So he basically created enough of a situation

with the van to where it went left instead of right. He shattered the windshield. And the fire truck was following the van. The van was basically a guide for the fire truck. The van went left and detonated. If there was one place where a 2,000-pound fire truck loaded with explosives could detonate, that's where they went. We were blessed. They went left; it [the blast] knocked him [Butler] down.

His protective equipment was covered in shrapnel. He survived, got back up, and the fire truck was coming in. He continued to shoot the windshield of the fire truck. And again, it shattered the windshield. They survived that, and they followed the van into a covered position and detonated. PFC Butler was on watch and wearing his gear, because five minutes before Corporal Minnus walked his post like he was supposed to. And I remember he called in five minutes before to the duty and logged it in, "Corporal Minnus reports post five, on duty, all secure." And he did that because his platoon commanders were walking their posts. So going back to the training piece, unit discipline. If he wasn't wearing his gear, if he wasn't awake...

Jones: What we'll do Frank, after we're finished with the interview, we'll put the DVD on and then you'll walk us through, again. If we can get that on the clip, too; okay? [28:21]

Diorio: Yes sir, absolutely. So I got the initial reports. I started to get some initial reports of casualties, but we weren't sure what we were dealing with. When I realized where it was, I went outside. I could see the aftermath of the explosion. There was still the smoke cloud. I thought I had lost about 150 Marines, because of where it was. Initially I ran back to COC and reported it. I thought I had a breach. There was incoming mortars, incoming RPGs from across the street, in some areas about 70 meters away. In other areas on the road from where they were taking direct fire to the main part of the base was about 250 meters. So, I thought I had a breach. I thought I had lost a lot of Marines. I called the battalion. I reported that I'm not exactly sure what I have right now, but this is what's going on. I asked them to get some air support pretty quickly. And again, there was a lot of incoming and outgoing fire. The outgoing fire made me feel better. The Marines were doing what they needed to do. Immediately I saw staff NCOs and officers going to their positions without me telling them. They started to resupply within five minutes. The First Sergeant ran out going to positions, trying to orient Marines on the enemy. So there was a lot going on. And then I got the reports on the radio. I quickly said I need to know what we're dealing with as far as casualties. Where do we need to send the reinforcements, the Quick Reaction Force. We sent a CAT Platoon out to where we thought the breach was. The first platoon called in and they were all accounted for. The second platoon called in and they were all

accounted for. The third platoon was all accounted for. And then weapons platoon was all accounted for. This was all within about 20 minutes.

After I got the reports that the Marines were initially all accounted for, I started realizing that there were some Marines with some internal injuries. We weren't sure what we were dealing with. So then we said, "Hey we've got everybody, but there's probably some Marines you need to get out of here." So we needed to try to work out a CASEVAC [casualty evacuation] in the middle of a fight which lasted three days.

Jones: Now how'd they try to breach the perimeter then with forces and all?

Diorio: Well, what we got afterwards from talking to the locals and some intelligence summaries was that the plan was to locate and breach the wall and cause a lot of casualties. They had gone in before the sun came up around 0530, right across the street. They had told all the locals to get out, so all the locals left. They took over all the positions on the street right across from us.

Jones: What size of the force are we talking about?

Diorio: Probably about 150.

Diorio: It was mostly local insurgents but some were from Syria. The drivers of the vehicles were from out of country. One was from Lebanon. Then they had foreign fighters there kind of as the commanders. They were directing them. The drivers were all from out of country. The assets were brought in from out of country. The locals were basically there as the recon pool. They brought them into the area to take all the locals out of the immediate area so they could take over the houses right across the street from us. So, the mortars were basically a decoy. That was designed to bring us out of our spaces, because at the time we were doing all operations at night. We went hard during the day. We went completely to the night cycle, because of the incoming mortars and the casualties during daytime. The other units were dealing with taking casualties during the day time. So we went completely to a night cycle. So, if you were outside in the day, you were doing an operation, going to the head, or you were moving from one place to another; there was no lingering outside. So the mortars were designed to kind of get us out of our spaces, to work the counter-mortar drills, and get the 81 crews up. Then the vehicles were designed to cause a lot of casualties. Then the enemy forces on the other side of the street were planning to assault my base. They assumed that they'd caused enough casualties that they would be able to do that. And they were in position to do it. But, what you'll hear on the video is immediately you'll hear a lot of gunfire going out. And what they found



out was that the Marines survived. And when the Marines survived, they kept their positions; they did what they had been trained to do.

Jones: Frank, I've had the value of listening to both Steve Davis and Colonel Mundy's descriptions of this. Obviously this was a pivotal point at the strategic level, too. This demonstrated the fact that there was a lot bigger and sophisticated force out there than what people had anticipated. [33:27] Is this something you as a company commander had been discussing with the battalion commander and others—that, "Hey, this is a lot different fight than people anticipated."

Diorio: It was a wake up, sir. I think we had always grouped everyone as insurgent, with very little appreciation for what that meant. In company meetings, we had talked about it a lot of times. "Well, what do you mean by *insurgent*? Is it a local? Is it a local with a grievance? Is it a local who's getting paid from somewhere else? Why are they doing this? Are they doing this because they need money? Are they doing this out of loyalty? What was it?" We had those conversations, and we came to different decision points on it. It drove some of the things we did. Case in point is the OP that we built. We built it there because we realized if we built that, the local insurgents were going to attack it, because they were getting paid to do so by outside elements. And so that was one thing that drove our tactics based on our understanding of the situation. But I really had no appreciation for the funding, for the capabilities. It was very myopic. [But that] showed me that they were able to move assets, to do it under our noses, to coordinate outside the country, to plan, and to coordinate. That was a pretty coordinated attack. They had to get a lot of things right to pull that off.

Jones: Well, talk to me now about what did this lead to as far as your practices and what your strategy was. And then what was the mood from Baghdad and others...relative to what kind of support you guys were receiving then after this big event.

Diorio: Yes, sir. Well, the video that we'll see, they actually put it on a web page that next day. And what you'll listen to in the video is the narrator. Basically, they [the insurgent videographer] follow the SVBIEDs to our base. And as they're traveling there, they're narrating that "This is going to be a great victory against the Coalition. This is going to be a great victory against the Americans. We're going to have our victory today, and we're going to have our victory in Iraq." This was basically their bid for success, and that's the narration. And so, the locals read the news, too. Immediately after this happened and word got out

that we didn't lose anybody, news agencies showed up. They wanted to do the story on the fact that there were no casualties despite this attack. And the locals got wind of it.

About a week after the attack, they were doing their announcements from the mosque. We listened to it that night and you could tell it was an outside agency that was using the mosque to put out messages over the speaker. And the message that week was "Americans didn't die because you're bad Muslims." That was exactly what they said. "If you were better Muslims, Americans would have died, so it's your fault. And the people of Husaybah are bad Muslims or else we would have had victory. God wasn't honored because Americans didn't die."

And so, probably about two days later, the Marines called me in, and they said, "Hey, sir, we heard a gunshot out in town. But it wasn't at us. It was out in the Market Place." So, we called the East End Lady, and said, "Hey, what's going on? What was that?" Because the ROE [rules of engagement] at the time was that if there was a weapon... [37:30]

Jones: So you had the ability to call her too then?

Diorio: At that time, we could call her. We rarely did at that time. She rarely called us. The only time she really called 1/7 from my understanding was when she had something specific about people she had a grievance against, so we rarely heard from her. We would call her every once in a while and say, "Do you have anything?" But we called her, and we said, "Hey what's going on?" And she said, "Well, there was a fight in the Market Place between the foreign fighters and a local. The local is making fun of them for not killing any of you guys. And the foreign fighters shot and killed him." So that was my first feeling that there was something going on in the atmospherics that we might be able to influence. Because at the time, it was just kinetic. There was no coordination, even with the East End Lady. It was a different type of information that we were getting. And so from there, I just started getting the feel there might be something that we can use. There was no inclination that they liked us either, but they were making fun of the foreign fighters basically. So I tried to find out who it was and I wasn't really getting any information.

One night I was going through a pile of INTSUMs just like I saw Andy Nelson do. This was information I had on my desk that had already been screened and cleansed by others. It was basically given to me as worthless information to be honest with you. It's chatter. And one of them was a summary about a local insurgent who had informed his group that the Americans in Al Qaim—which was the main base 25 kilometers [battalion headquarters located east of Husaybah]—were conducting a raid in a certain area 25 kil-

ometers east of us. He said that they [his people] should let them go and not interfere with them, because they were going to go attack these guys. It looks like they're on their way to this area, which is not our area. And I just remember staring at it. And what I had was a guy taking leadership. I had a guy who was giving orders, and I had a guy picking and choosing someone else other than the people we were fighting. And I just remember just staring at it for about an hour.

And so I called my interpreter. He is a Marine. He was born to Iraqi parents who moved to Chicago. He was born and raised in Chicago, but they continued to speak the language. So I had an interpreter who was a Marine, who thought like a Marine, who could talk like a Marine. He also appreciated information that was valuable. So I said, "Can you ask who this is?" And we called the East End Lady, and she didn't know who it was. But she said, "There may be some other people who might know." So we tried, and they were all dead ends. So we dropped flyers all over the city that said, "If you have any information, give us a call." One day we had someone call. She was actually a young girl, 16 years old. She just wanted to talk. She said, "I saw this flyer with the number on it, and I just wanted to see what Americans sound like." And so my interpreter started talking to her. I told him, "Don't ask her any tactical questions. Don't ask for any information. Just talk to her." She wound up having a crush on my interpreter, and she'd call every day just to talk to him. And so after three weeks I said, "Okay, ask her who this is." He called her and said, "Hey, by the way, do you know who this is?" [41:34] And she said, "Oh yeah, he lives here." And I said, "Call her back, and see if she can get his phone number." She said, "Yeah, I can get his phone number." I said, "How are you going to get his phone number?" She's like, "Oh, my mom knows him. We live in the same area." So we said, "Well, can you get his number without him knowing?" She said, "Yeah, I can get it." So, she called us about four days later with his phone number. I sat on it for about three weeks. At the time it just felt like it was still to close with everything going on. I wanted to get more atmospherics.

And so then finally I told my Staff Sergeant, my interpreter. I said, "Okay, call him, and see if he wants to meet." And he called him, and he said, "Yeah, he wants to meet." So I said, "Okay." And so we tried the cloak and dagger, middle of the night, in the road. It didn't work, because he was afraid we were going to shoot him when he walked down even though we had done all the precautions. We tried another place north, a couple kilometers, but it didn't work. He didn't get there in time, and we left. We didn't feel good about being there.

So finally he called one day, and he said, "Come into the bank and arrest me." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Just come into the bank. I'll be there at one o'clock. Come and arrest me." I said, "Okay." So, we sent our snipers out to the bank in broad daylight, something we had never done before. It took everyone by surprise. We went into the bank, put him in cuffs, and arrested him. And when the Marines came back they said, "Sir, we got him. He's in a building, the platoon position," which was forward about 150 meters. "He's waiting for you, but everyone looked really mad in there." So, I went in there, and it was very surreal. It was a bombed out building. The roof was gone. There was left over remnants of the SVBIED. He was sitting on a cinder block. Myself and my First Sergeant went down there. He was with a couple Marines who were watching him. They had taken the cuffs off at the time. I walked in. The first thing he did was smile. He was about 5'2", and on a good day I'm about 5'7". He looked at me with a big smile, and he said, "So, the Marines let short people be in charge too." And I said, "I guess so. I guess so."

So that kind of broke the ice a little bit. We had been taught a lot of difference things about how to do a meeting and how you should go through these procedures to meet and talk with people. I very quickly got a feel that this is just a man sitting in front of me who was taking leadership, and I should just be as frank with him as possible. So basically we just started talking very frankly. I said, "Here's the deal. This is your town. This is not our town. We have no intention of taking over your town. We're here, and we'll stay here until there is peace brought here. That's our mission. But unless there's peace and people can live in safety and security, we are not leaving. Once that's achieved, you can assume that we're going to leave. But not until that happens."

And he said, "Well, it is our town." And I said, "Well, would you like to have a part in making it that way?" And he said, "Absolutely." At the time, militias weren't allowed. There was no partnering in our area, so it was kind of a gray area. But I knew I had something that I had to work with. And so we talked for maybe ten minutes. It was a very straight forward conversation. The last thing I said to him was, "I think it would be best if you don't trust me. And I promise, I don't trust you." And he smiled, and he said, "That's the most honest thing I've heard in the last two years." I said, "Okay, then we'll go that way." I said, "I don't trust you. You shouldn't trust me." He said, "Okay." We shook hands, and we left. I knew I couldn't make any agreements with him. I knew I couldn't make any promises. I didn't have the authority to do that. We didn't even say what we were going to do. We just agreed to not trust one another. We looked at each other and said, "This is what

I believe, and this is what you believe and how you want this place to go. We're working towards the same thing." That was really the purpose of the meeting. [45:50]

So about four days later we got a phone call from him. He said, "Just so you know, you're going to get attacked tonight from the north. About 30 guys are going to come attack your position out there by the forward position." He had a local name for it. I said, "Okay." And I didn't even say, "Thank you," because at the time, I realized we shouldn't have even had that relationship. I said, "Okay. Goodbye." And so I put the Marines on watch. And that night when we got attacked, the Marines were ready. It was highly successful. They attacked our base. We put the Marines out in forward positions, and it was highly successful. I didn't call him back to say thank you.

We had gotten information that some foreign fighters from the tribe to the east of us in Karabilah—the Salmanis—were going to come into town. They had figured out somehow that someone had warned us, because it was a lopsided attack. They got hit hard. So we got some information that foreign fighters were going to attack a portion of a contending tribe—the Albu-Mahals—to the east into the city to attack them. The Salmanis were going to come in with some funds and equipment from the foreign fighters to pay a visit to the Albu-Mahal tribe, and pay them back for warning us. I don't know how they figured that out, but they did. So we had gotten that information. So we called him, and we said, "Just so you know, you're going to get attacked tonight in this area." And he said, "Okay." He didn't say, "thank you." And that night they got attacked. They were ready, and it was another lopsided event. So, again, he didn't call back. We just let it go that way for a while. And I reported up to higher that this was going on. Again, militias weren't allowed. They reported that information to the division that this was going on.

Throughout June and into July they would call us, and we would call them if we knew anything. And then finally one night we heard this huge fire fight in the middle of the city, and it was big. It was right in the center of the city where we knew he [our source] lived. We could basically tell that was the area. And in another surreal moment of my time there, I got a phone call from his wife who directed me to send the helicopters. Her house was getting attacked on all sides. After going through all the JTAC [Joint Terminal Attack Controller] classes and all the fire support classes, and after all the "who has terminal authority on fire support" discussions, I had an insurgent's wife telling me to send helicopters. It hit me! And at that moment I knew I had buy in. They felt like we had that kind of relationship. But I also knew that they were getting attacked, and I had to do something, but I wasn't sure what to do.

I quickly went through all the processes in my mind. I can't necessarily say, "No." I could say, "No," but I didn't know what the effects would be. I don't have authority to request helicopters to support people who claim that they are no longer insurgents. I don't feel good calling in aircraft in case it's an ambush. I felt like I owed it to our Marine pilots not to just call them in. And I knew I couldn't anyway. At the same time this was still very new to everyone at Headquarters. Even if I tried to explain it, it probably wouldn't make a whole lot of sense, and it would take a lot of time. And we didn't have time.

So I quickly remembered that probably about every other night we had a patrol done by helicopters trying to jam IEDs that were in the city. They basically flew the same route every other night as a counter-IED patrol. They basically tried to detonate IEDs with their jamming systems and whatnot. So I just asked the OD, "Hey, are we having a patrol tonight?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "When are they on station?" He said, "about a half hour." I said, "Okay." I called him back, and I said, "They're on their way." And she said, "Okay." And we could hear the fire fight continuing. And we called the pilots, and we said, "Hey, there's a fire fight in the city tonight. We'd appreciate it if you could continue but please stay in the periphery, continue doing your patrol, but there's a fire fight tonight going on in the city, just so you're aware." They're like, "Okay, we'll stay above and beyond, but we'll make sure that we can be heard." And so they did their counter-IED patrol. She called back about an hour later, and she thanked us. She said it worked. She was screaming into the phone, "It worked! They fled; they ran away once they heard your helicopters. Thank you for sending the helicopters." And I said, "You're welcome."

And at that point, when they said *thank you*, I knew that we were working towards something. At that point we started getting phone calls from this guy named Falzi. He had been a former border policeman who lost his job when they all went away. And so this was towards the end of July and the beginning of August. We started seeing a lot of kinetic activity that wasn't towards us. Additionally, there was a lot more of foreign fighter influence coming to the city. [51:15]

Jones: Was it red on red?

Diorio: Yes, sir. Basically the Salmani tribe had joined up with foreign fighters to fight the Albu-Mahal tribe, who was now basically feeding us information and working with us. And at this time we had gotten approval to work with them.

Jones: Now how did you cultivate these tribal relationships? Did most of it come from this one source or what?

Diorio: It was this one source. He would work as the contact. We would pass information through, and he would disseminate it. As we worked together, we had some tough decisions. We had to do things out of the ordinary. Case in point, we did a raid up north and we found an RPK [Ruchnoy Pulemyot Kalashnikova] in the house. The rule was they were allowed to have a machine gun in the house. Anything above that, they weren't allowed to have, and we took it. And he called me a day later, and said, "Hey, we need that. That protects us from these attacks we're having." I said, "Well, just so you know, that's out of the ordinary. We want to keep that." And he said, "I'm telling you, it would mean a lot to us if we kept it." And so I said, "Okay, we're coming up there tonight, we're giving it back." And what was great about it was the Marines understand this. Sergeants, corporals, and my squad leader were talking about how to now cultivate this. My squad leader said, "Sir, we need to give it back." And I said, "But I have the burden of knowing this could get turned around on you guys." And he said, "Give it back." And so I said, "Well I'm going to think about it." I talked to higher a little bit. I asked if we have authority to give it back, and they said, "Yeah." So I told him, "We're going to give it back to you, but if I see any automatic fire coming this direction, we're coming back to your house and we're going to take the RPK and everyone in the house." So, we gave it back and never got a single round towards us that way.

When the fire truck blew up, it blew up the water supply to the city. There was no water to the city. And immediately after the attack, multiple times, they asked us to fix it, and we refused. It was one of those things where you talk about civil affairs projects that we need to do. This was one of those cases where we said, "You allowed the fire trucks to come down and blow it up. We're not sending our Marines out there to try to fix it until we know it's safe and until you've proven that you can make it safe." That was going on about four weeks and there was no water. They were getting water from elsewhere, but it was causing problems for them. And so later on we remembered this. We had done no civil affair projects in the light of day. We did no photo ops, nothing like that. Everything we did was under the cover of darkness. One of the most successful ones [civil affairs projects] we did was we load up all our Amtrak, and we went out in the middle of the night and we dropped off about 500 cases of water at the front door of every building that had lost water. Again, talking about surreal moments, just as the sun came up, you could see the door open just enough to pull the water in. They wanted to make sure no one saw them getting help from us. That day we had people we had never talked to call

the base. They said, "Thank you for the water, and thank you for caring more about us instead of you guys." [54:54]

When I was looking through some of my stuff, sir, I found a piece of the fire truck and I found the actual piece of paper that my staff sergeant gave me with his [the source's] phone number on it.

Jones: Is he still alive?

Diorio: He's not. It's an interesting story. The end state of this is he and his brother became CIA sources.

Jones: This all came from you, though? It all started with you.

Diorio: Yes, sir. And really it was SIGINT that I was reading. I think about it now, it was in the middle of a stack of about 200 pieces of paper. But they both became CIA sources. But there was a family feud there. I think Falzi killed his brother and then the family killed him. But he wound up working with the Desert Protectors. I'll talk about it, but he became the OIC of the Desert Protectors for a little bit.

[New video tape]

Jones: Okay, Frank, continue please. We're talking about your source there and how it connected to tribes and then how that developed.

Diorio: So that day we delivered several hundred cases of water to the people without water. We started getting phone calls from different people to thank us. And one of the After Action comments was, "Thank you for caring more about us than caring about you. We know why you did it at night. You knew we would get visited if people found out we accepted your water, so thank you." And they started calling us, so we started cultivating other sources. At this time, we started seeing a lot more kinetic activity in the town, and it was obviously geared towards the Albu-Mahal tribe in Husaybah coming from the Salmani tribe east of Husaybah in the H&K triangle in Karabilah, too. Husaybah and Karabilah. And the Salmani tribe was gaining more and more support from outside influences and foreign fighters. The rhetoric was they were going to come and teach the Albu-Mahals a lesson for working with the Americans.

This is when the unit came in . Often times we would hear fire fights or see people with weapons. Because of the kinetic nature of the fight, at the time, the ROE in Husaybah was we could engage anyone with a weapon. They knew they couldn't have a weapon outside, because they could be engaged. To give you an idea, I think at the time, we were one of the



only units authorized to have Claymores [directional anti-personnel mine] outside its lines, because it was so close and so kinetic. And so my Marines—lance corporals, corporals, PFCs [privates first class], privates—would see weapons and not engage, because they realized that we were working on something more than just kinetic operations. I went back to talk about it with Colonel Mundy. Initially he said, “Hey, everything’s kinetic. You’ve got to be able to break off from that.” I started to see the fruition of that. But it also meant they had to have the discipline to be able to go kinetic if they needed to. At this time, I wound up getting visits from other governmental agencies asking if they could come to Husaybah and meet with our sources. And they did. I don’t really necessarily know if it was by choice, but we were more than happy to meet. Anyone who was willing to come out and find out what was going on was a good thing. [03:02]

Jones: And this all kind of emanated from this one guy then?

Diorio: Yes, sir. It all emanated from what was going on in the city due to his leadership. The take away was that a Sunni tribe from Husaybah was taking up arms against another Sunni tribe in Karabilah. Now you have two Sunni tribes split in Al Anbar. I think that anyone could see that there’s something there. And so it started getting some interest. So we had some personnel from other government agencies come out. They wanted to meet with my contact and see the area.

Not too long after that it was obvious that the Albu-Mahal were becoming the target of the foreign fighters. And this was winding down towards the end of our deployment now. It was probably mid-August towards turn over. We wound up basically getting some information that on one specific night, 2,000—they always inflated numbers—foreign fighters gathered to come kill my contact, my source, his family, and his immediate tribe. I doubt it was 2,000, but that’s the rhetoric that was going on at the time anyway. And we found out that there was a sizable amount of people coming in, because we did get a phone call from the East End Lady. We were in contact with her. We said, “We hear there are a lot of people coming in. Where are they staying?” And at this point she said, “The Palace.”

The Palace was in the middle of Husaybah, northeast of Husaybah. Off the road was this beautiful, big castle-type palace. We had visited it a couple times. It was predominately empty except for a woman who had lived there. Her husband had gone away, and he left it. He had not come back. He went to Baghdad, so she lived there by herself. She said, “They’re all living in the palace.” I said, “How many are there?” She said, “About 250.” At the same time there’s a lot of rhetoric that Zargawi himself was coming to lead this,

because he was annoyed by this Sunni tribe rising up against another Sunni tribe. Again, there's probably people who know if that's true or not. That's the rhetoric that was out there.

Regardless, we had gotten word that there was 250 foreign fighters in this palace prepared to assault the Albu-Mahal tribe. This information now started to gain a lot of attention. Colonel Mundy was working with me with the division, General Huck. What was interesting was this was information now coming strictly from Iraqi sources. We did not have any eyes on it. I think one of the take aways, one of the most vital aspects was trust by your higher command. One of the best things I will always remember about Colonel Mundy was that he would trust me; he trusted us. If we reported information, he believed that it was well thought out, that it was as accurate as we could best give him, that we weren't going to push any bond that wasn't accurate, and that we had done our homework. He would then do the same thing and go up to his higher headquarters and say this is information that we're getting, and we believe it. We also had the support and now OGA [other government agencies] were involved and could confirm a lot of this stuff.

The take away of that was a strike was authorized against the palace. And quite a bit of ordinance was devoted to it. The confirmation was that they had gotten the majority of the personnel that were in there. Some of the personnel had gotten away, but there were at least 100 that were killed. And that news started to make it through Husaybah. It was obvious that the Albu-Mahal had forward eyes that were working for the Coalition. And that was some of the stuff that really hit hard. One of the most difficult aspects was you [Coalition] couldn't go anywhere into this type of environment without getting recognized. Now, for the first time the foreign fighters had the same problem. They thought they could go and blend in. They couldn't blend in anymore, because the locals could tell them apart, and the locals were giving up information on them. And for the first time they were facing that same problem that we were facing. It was obvious, because they were struggling in their movements.

So this happened very quickly. An airstrike was authorized against the palace. From there, that spun up in a week. That spun up more anger. AQIZ [Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq] got directly involved. AQIZ directly came in with plus numbers to go ahead and complete the assault on the Albu-Mahal. This brought in hundreds or more foreign fighters. At this point, they had all moved to the largest hotel in Husaybah. It was a two-story building, but it was probably, maybe 50 to 60 rooms long. It was a big hotel, two stories. It was the Yellow Hotel. That was near the East End Lady. She called us and said, "So

you know, the guys who survived that other strike and a lot of guys who came in from out of town, there all in the hotel.” And then we said, “Well, how many?” She says, “There’s hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these guys in the hotel.” And again, information we passed up to higher. We called Falzi, and at this point he was locked in his house, he couldn’t get out. He was surrounded. And so we called out to our other sources that we received throughout the time that we’d spent there. Some of the people who’d called us to thank us for the water, we kept their numbers. We said, “Hey is this true? Where are these people going?” And they said, “They’re going to the hotel.” At the same time the city is completely kinetic. We were on our base. The city is in one big fire fight.

Jones: Red on red.

Diorio: Red on red, and outnumbered, outmanned, outgunned, and increasingly getting pushed to one corner of the city, the southeast part of the city, which was farthest away from us to where we could help them. And they, the Albu-Mahal, were getting crunched. [9:40] They’re getting beat back, and they’re taking it pretty hard. And the AQIZ made a foothold into the city. And again we can’t tell who’s who, and we couldn’t get in the middle of it even if we chose to. What they did is they split the Albu-Mahal, to the southeast part of the city and the north part of the city. And this was evolving by the minute. We were getting frantic phone calls: “We’re getting run over.” And then perhaps the most surreal moments I’ve talked about, we saw in the hundreds members of Iraqis come out of the north end of the city towards our OP that we had built with their hands up. They are now coming in full daylight out of the city towards our OP with their hands up. Falzi, our source, was calling us saying, “These are my people please help them. We’re getting killed.”

To watch them openly see us as their help, as their rescuers, in broad daylight with their hands up was amazing. To me that was the point where the entire city, the foreign fighters, AQIZ, saw the Albu-Mahals say, “The Marines are our help.” And they came in droves. And again talk about discipline. I had Marines now who at this point had fought over 300 fire fights and had faced the largest attack against a Coalition base. They’d been through a lot, and they withheld their fire in a real display of discipline. They read the people. But they could also tell that there were some people who did not have the best intentions, trying to mingle in with these people. And the Marines responded accordingly. That raised their level of awareness and their threat level. You could see these people back off. So, I think they were trying to blend in, and get inside our lines. So we told the people coming in, “We’re going to treat you like we would treat any other prisoner right now.” He [one of the people approaching our position] was like, “I under-

stand, and they [motioning to the others in the group] know it.” And so we handcuffed them. We blindfolded them...

Jones: How many people are you talking about?

Diorio: Probably about 60. So we had about 60 prisoners in the bottom level of the front base of that squad position that the company built. And so we started processing them up the chain, “We now have 60 members of the Albu-Mahal who have surrendered to us. What do we do with them?” We brought them back to the main part of the base. At the same time, we’re getting numbers that the hotel is filling up. We hear the kinetic fight is going on. We’re still getting phone calls from Falzi’s family saying, “We’re going to die. We’re getting crushed.” And you start to wonder, “Is this going bad?” And that was some of the thought processes. “Hey, it was great that it worked for a while, but this is going bad now.”

Immediately the Marines were the ones who were like, “Sir, this is a good thing that they see us this way.” The Marines wanted to go out and defend the Albu-Mahal. I was the one who had to say this needs to be coordinated with higher. We need to make sure this is done right. There was a buy in there from the Marines that this is now bigger than us. This is bigger than just doing a deployment and getting in a fight. This is bigger than that, and we need to make sure this lasts. We need to make sure that this matters. We need to go protect them. And I said, “Let’s get higher involved.” Higher is involved. The division is involved. The regiment is involved. Colonel Davis was involved. Colonel Mundy was involved. They were all ready into what was going on. They were sending up the request for airstrikes. They were defending why we needed these airstrikes. Basically, Falzi and his family and his tribe left Husaybah altogether and they went south. It was basically a NEO [noncombatant evacuation operation] of sorts for them.

Jones: What was then left of the Albu-Mahal tribe in Husaybah then?

Diorio: Largely they left. They had to get out of there. And largely what happened then was AQIZ came in and the Salmani with AQIZ took over Husaybah. And this was as we were leaving. At this point, I was at Al Asad doing my turnover with regiment. I sat down with Colonel Davis and did a turnover with him at Al Asad. Then we made our way out. So the status at this point was Albu-Mahal’s existence was saved, but their footprint in Husaybah was gone. AQIZ now came in and took over. They made life rough for the people who remained behind. I think what we were left with was an initial thought that this failed. Then as we continued to think about it, we thought that this is the tipping point that every counterinsurgency needs. This is the tipping point that you now

have a Sunni tribe, Albu-Mahal, who to the point of their very own lives, sided with Coalition Forces, sided with India Company, sided with Marine Corps. That's a good thing! And you asked me, "What we would've done if we stayed?" I honestly think that we probably couldn't have seen what we needed to see because of what had gone through [that it was time for a turnover, time for a fresh set of eyes to work the problem].

That's why I think 3/6 had a very difficult job coming in. Now they had a tribe who felt entitled, because they put their necks on the line. Yes, we do have a tipping point, but we also have another tribe who was realizing they're the odd man out. And you also have a foreign fighter problem, and they aren't going to give it up. And I think what they did initially with 2/1 and 3/6 and cleared through Husaybah, and then 3/6 staying on, they [3/6] had a very difficult task of bringing everyone to the table. [18:26]

Jones: But one point here, I wouldn't say I'm confused, but I want to make sure I understand is that, now, the higher leadership understands that we're at a pivotal point. And when 3/6 came in, that's when we galvanized a couple operations. And it gave 3/6 the platform to actually go into Husaybah and Al Qaim and really develop a comprehensive coverage and whatnot. Is that correct?

Diorio: Yes, sir. We had a tribe that was supporting the Coalition, but they still needed to bring the foundation in order to even talk about bringing everyone to the table. They still had to prove to everyone else that Coalition Forces controlled Husaybah. Which by the time we left, we couldn't say that. When Albu-Mahal left, the vacuum was filled by AQIZ. That's when the MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit] came in with 3/6 and some Iraqi battalions, cleared it, and then 3/6 started bringing everyone to the table, which I think was an incredible job. I don't think we could have done it to anywhere near the level of success they had, because we had already seen things the way we had seen things. I think you needed that fresh set of eyes and that different perspective to say, "Okay, now we need to bring everyone to the table." And that's what initially happened from my understanding.

While down in Akashat, the Desert Protectors were kind of formed. They actually came back in November, and worked alongside the unit that cleared Husaybah. They knew the area very well. Once that operation was done, they stayed in the area and assisted. Colonel Alford and 3/6 really brought the Salmani tribe and Karabilah to the table. They brought Albu-Mahal back into the fold. The tipping point basically showed the Salmani tribe that they're the odd man out in this. The Coalition Forces aren't going anywhere. The Albu-Mahal will get everything if you don't cooperate. At the same time, which I

think was the hardest part, Albu-Mahal had to realize that, yes they stuck their neck out, but this was only going to work if everyone came to the table. They weren't going to get everything. And that's what I think 3/6 did a tremendous job of. And I think from that spring board, obviously, that success of bringing Sunni tribes to the table continued east towards what we call the Awakening.

Jones: Well how much time did you have with Pitchford [the follow-on company commander from 3/6] then? Or did you have anytime with Pitchford?

Diorio: None. When I was on the tarmac, we literally passed each other. My platoon was already in route. I came out on August 30th. Basically the hotel had been dropped. The palace had been dropped, and we had already had a platoon move out. We were already moving forward. At this point I was in Al Asad when Pitchford came. He turned over with my XO.<sup>2</sup> [22:18]

Jones: Talk to me then if you would, Frank, about the sources. Of course the term *CLIC* wasn't in vogue yet, but you talked about this one particular guy and how pivotal and important he was. But did you develop any de facto, company level intel cells? Did you have a HET that was with you much of the time or some of the time?

Diorio: I did, sir. I had a HET that was with me most of the time, [but they were] young. I'll be honest with you, I micromanaged the intelligence. Not because of any lack of effort or lack of capability on their part, but there was a lack of appreciation for the value of the intel. There was no way anyone could appreciate what that bit of information meant to the company more than I could. And I don't say that because of me, I mean that for any company commander. The commander needs to be aware of all the kinetic operations, non-kinetic operations. He needs to be aware of all the operations that are going on in his units. He gets all the feedback. So information is just that until it's synthesized. I felt like at that level, it couldn't be synthesized with full appreciation unless I was the one who had the final look at it. Now I had an intel officer who worked very hard. He basically relayed information to me. The after action I got was that even their synthesis was off. And like I said, even the pile of information I used a lot was stuff that had been passed to me as invaluable.

Jones: Had you got into biometrics at all or was it just too kinetic for biometrics?

<sup>2</sup> Major Diorio's first child was due in 48 hours and Colonel Mundy directed that he return home. The company XO handled the remainder of the turnover with Capt Pitchford.

Diorio: It was way too kinetic.

Information from the RadBn [radio battalion] was valuable. The other reason was it wasn't their [his intel people's] fault was because of the clearance level. I was the only one that had a clearance to discuss anything with those assets and that was invaluable. So, I really micromanaged that aspect of it. I wanted to be involved. And of course any actionable information was done after full synthesis of intel. I trusted their information, but, if I could take the time and really figure out the second- or third order effects of acting on any of that was, I did.

Jones: What time did you spend with the battalion S2? Did he come out your way quite a bit?

Diorio: Again, because of the distance and the other things that were going on, he really couldn't. He visited probably two or three times during the deployment. We talked a lot on the secure line. One of the problems with intelligence was the track that it had to go through. Intelligence that could have been directly given to me had to go two/three echelons higher, be looked at, and then down to that echelon, then the next echelon. A lot of the times, by the time it came to me, when they figured out who the information could help based on where they found out the information was coming from—location and everything else—it was old. So, we had talks about that, "Hey I need this information. If there's information that gets highlighted as a certain specific area, I need that passed down as soon as possible." And everyone along the way and even through division said, "We understand, that and we're working through the existing system that's in place right now. We understand it's slow. We're trying to speed it up." So anytime I could get intel right away, I wanted it.

And again, I think the most important thing—whether it's with how we did Civil Affairs, how I interacted with my sources, or how I used my intelligence section—I told my Marines, "It's very important not to tell vignettes or absolutes." The way I did things was successful for me. It was successful because of the place that it was happening. It was successful in that context. I think it very well might not be successful in a different town, and it very well might not be successful in another time. I think there are some basics that can be taken from it, that can be successful, but by no means am I saying this is the way to do it.

I also learned that the answer to, "How do you win in counterinsurgency?" is, "It depends." It depends on the area, it depends on the history, it depends on what the effects

are going to be. But by no means would what I did work everywhere else or anywhere else. I think it has to be specific.

Jones: You obviously created a critical event with the development of your combat outpost. It created the perception that there was going to be another Fallujah. Did you have any success like that? Did you continue to cultivate that type of reaction? [27:38]

Diorio: Not to that level of success. We had looked at it. There were several other areas that were looked at, but we felt we were just too thin. We had four platoons. One platoon was in the platoon area, and one squad from that platoon was at the outpost. We had a platoon on security. We had a platoon that was on operations, which meant they were free to do raids. They were free to do cordon and knocks and cordon and searches. Then we had a platoon that was rest and refitting. And part of that rest and refitting was they trained. So training was continuous through the entire deployment. We went ahead and looked at new TTPs, and we trained in those TTPs. So, we were just too thin.

We actually looked at taking the palace as an outpost. We actually worked through the COA [course of action] and did the planning on it. We found out that it would be in line with what we had figured out—how do we have presence without being on every street corner? The palace was something we looked at taking because it then connected us to the H&K Triangle, which would then give us a further eastern lead that we could say we owned. That was one of the rules we set: if you don't own it, don't act like you do...meaning, don't go walking down the road if it hasn't been cleared. If you don't have observation for 24 hours, you don't own it. And so we were looking for places we could go to where we could say, "We own this road, because we see it for 24 hours. I can tell you there are no IEDs. We can go up and down it freely." And unless we could say that then every operation we did we re-cleared the route every time. And the palace would give us a place on the northeast sector where we could say we own this valuable intersection, but when we did the troop to task we couldn't do it. So, we were having a lot of success at the combat outpost. And again, the rhetoric and the perception of the locals was that anytime anyone attacked the outpost, they didn't fare well. And we never took a casualty at that outpost. It got attacked about 100 times with small arms and RPGs. But they had to expose themselves to attack it. Every time the locals heard an attack, they woke up in the morning and they realized that the enemy had lost guys. They saw the enemy laying in the street. They saw the Americans up with no Medevac helicopters coming in. And that was always taught to my Marines when we talked about discipline and perception.



Discipline was the key to making sure that we did not give them any easy victories. We wanted the locals to see the enemy lying in the street. We wanted the locals to see after a four-hour firefight no Medevac helicopters came in, because we weren't taking casualties. If we took casualties, they better have earned it. So we weren't going to take casualties, because we weren't wearing our gear. We weren't going to take casualties, because we were undisciplined. We weren't going to take casualties, because we wanted to do things during the daytime because it would have been easier. It was hard! Life at Camp Gannon for Marines was very, very difficult. They lived in underground bunkers...

Jones: I listened to Colonel Davis' interview. He uses a phrase "Be everywhere but nowhere." Did you hear that phrase at all?

Diorio: Yes, sir. And that was part of it. We wanted to make them think we could be anywhere at any time. We wanted them to think we could get anywhere at any time. Even if we knew that wasn't possible, we wanted them to think we could. And what the combat outpost did, was that gave us multiple avenues of approaching the city. And we were able to get anywhere we wanted to, but we had to keep them guessing. And we were very successful by doing that. We were able to execute the avenues of approach that previously we couldn't. So, absolutely! They felt like we could hit any place at any time. But we made sure that they weren't able to prevent that from happening.

Jones: Frank, before we go to the tape here, I want you to talk to the video. Was there a lot of senior leadership that came out to Camp Gannon at all after the fire truck?

Diorio: Yes sir.

Jones: You mentioned some of the other agencies, but did General Casey or others come out to Camp Gannon? Obviously that was a point when we realized that the enemy situation was much more difficult, much different than what we anticipated?

Diorio: To be honest with you, I don't think really people were really sure what we were dealing with. This was new. We had a Sunni tribe working with the Marines, which was new in Al Anbar. Everyone in my chain of command came. General Huck came out and walked the lines with me. Colonel Davis came out and walked the lines with me. Colonel Mundy came out and walked the lines with me several time. The value in that was they came out and saw what the Marines were going through. What that translated to was when I called in something, they could put a visual perspective to it and say, "I know what he's talking about and I agree with him" or "I know India Company."

Colonel Alford gave me the best compliment on his PDSS. He said, "You have a very disciplined unit here." I said, "Well thank you, sir." And he said, "Do you know how I know that?" I said, "No." He said, "I went in your head," which is the plywood head, with sandbags on top. He said, "There's no graffiti." And he said, "I can tell you have good NCOs." And that was the type of thing that we needed to have support so people could trust what we were doing. Because I am sure there was a lot of temptation to say, "Hey, that's a captain out there dealing with strategic type stuff. We're going to put our necks on the line for what he's saying. By and large, everyone in my chain of command said, "We've been out there. We know what they're doing. We've seen them show self control. We've seen them when they say this is what they're looking at." We were honest with them when they had an idea, and they said, "What do you think of this idea." When we thought it was a bad idea, we told them and we told them why.

I remember I had a conversation with Colonel Davis. He was sitting at a forward post with me, and we were talking through rules of engagement, why should it change. I said, "This is why I need to be able to take morning shots. Because it achieves perception on the enemy. They don't know what we're doing, and why we're doing it." And that was something that was highly spoken against. But he came out and he looked at it. He said, "Well, I'll pass it up [the chain of command], but I understand why you're saying that." He understood when we said, "This is why we need to have this ROE. This is why we need to have Claymores. This is why I want to be able to work with this source." Because at the time, this was new. We had insurgents, and we had Marines. That's how everyone was being looked at. So when I was calling up saying, "Hey, this guy no doubt was probably a former insurgent, but he is saying I want to work with you, can I do it?" And it went up to Colonel Davis to General Huck, and it had to get approval. Every time they said, "We've been there. We can talk it. This is why we agree with what you're saying." [35:18]

Jones: Was Brian Stann one of your guys?

Diorio: Yes sir. He was attached to me when he got a Silver Star in Karabilah.

Jones: Tell me about that event. He wasn't with you at that time?

Diorio: He was attached to me at that time. The battalion had gone north of the Euphrates for Matador. And the battalion started taking heavy fire in Ubaydi trying to get across the river. I was not part of Matador. Part of my tie into that was they asked me to go seize the Karabilah Bridge, so that insurgents couldn't flee south of the Euphrates. They wanted them to stay north and for the battalion to fly in and be able to achieve surprise there.

So they asked us, "Hey, we need you to go seize the bridge. Can you do it?" I said, "Well, its seven kilometers away. It's at night, and it's along the Euphrates. You're asking us to do it. We'll do it, and we're on our way." So I had a plan. The plan was for me to take two platoons up north to the bridge and secure the bridge with a CAT Platoon. By the time I got back to Camp Gannon, my XO was there. He had the company at the time for about a week when I was gone. He said, "Hey, sir, your plan's changed." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "The timeline's changed, you've got to go now." I said, "Well, we can't do this now. The end-state is to secure the bridge. We'll send CAT who can leave in 15 minutes." So we gave him the order and it was probably an hour-and-a-half later when we sent the CAT out. The original plan was to go dismounted and to walk there, because we didn't think we could take vehicles along the Euphrates and that was the route that we had to go. I learned that with the tanks getting stuck. But we didn't have time to do that, so CAT had to go. You talk about friction, sir, something on the map said they should be there in 45 minutes, but it took eight hours. [37:58]

Jones: And CAT was Brian Stan?

Diorio: No sir, that was the CAT that was attached to me at that time. Brian Stan was back at the main base at Al Qaim as a reaction force for Matador. So, at the time I called back and it was obvious we weren't going to get there by the time the sun came up, which was our timeline. I went back and I said, "Sir, the vehicles are stuck. We've got to dig them out. They're not going to make it to the bridge." And at that time then Brian was given the task, "Hey, go seize the bridge." I had a lot of intel that a lot of the enemy forces were south of the bridge at the time. They were already south before we even started our movement. So Brian was given the command to go right up through Karabilah, direct due north, but it was a choke point. The enemy didn't have to do much. They hit an SVBIED. They had a SVBIED basically waiting on a route. He got through that enroute, and then when he got there, the enemy had hid all kinds of stuff. They had hidden several IEDs right on the bridge, and it was a mess. So he wasn't given much time to prepare either. It was kind of like, "Hey you need to go secure the bridge now." He went and did that. He secured it, but it was a fight.

Jones: What did we not cover that you'd like to say?

Diorio: Sir, I just think the appreciation for what corporals and lance corporals can understand. They can understand strategic-level stuff. The breakthrough came when we were sitting down in our after actions, and they were talking about strategic-level stuff. And

they came to me with strategic-level ideas. And the idea that a company can have a strategic influence. I think they absolutely can. The strategic level really isn't thought of as residing down there, but it absolutely did.

And then I think in this case, the Anbar Awakening was ground up. Obviously the gain was made by many people and many units. You can talk about the aspects of nation building, but you have to have some sort of success to go off of. I think if anything, Frank Diorio had plenty of ideas, but it was lance corporals and corporals who brought them to me. I was able to explain them to higher and get them coordinated. If anyone's going to say that India Company had a part in Anbar Awakening, it was India Company, it wasn't me.

They came to me with ideas on how to affect things at different levels. They had the awareness. They were the ones who said, "Don't shoot" when they had every right to shoot. They were the ones who said, "Hey, sir, I'm watching this. I've noticed every time we take incoming mortars, this lady in Syria is putting a colored mat out on her porch and ten minutes later we're take incoming mortars." We watched it, and he was absolutely right. We were able to do some interdiction on that next time, and it stopped. I mentioned in the beginning, we took mortars every day for two months. That's bad for morale. The Marines would say, "Hey, sir, it's coming from a point of origin. We're not going to go chase this point of origin." The units before, every time they were told to go find a point of origin, they took casualties en route.

The enemy is not stupid. They set up IEDs along the route. They'd come get it, hit the IEDs, and they never even got there. The point of origin had IEDs on it so there's no point in going there. They said, "What we're realizing is that the enemy is doing their corrections using people on top of buildings. Every time we take mortars, you can always look online to the point of origin." There are people on top of buildings. And what they're doing is, we're getting hit, they're passing back their corrections verbally, and over time the people are making their corrections. By the time we fulfill our counter-mortar drill according to rules of engagement—which say you're allowed to shoot ten rounds back, no more, you can do less, but you can't do more than that—by the time we're doing that, they're long gone. The chances of a mortar having a direct hit on their mortar system sitting in the field is just not going to happen. So they would make their corrections, and they'd come back two days later.

This ties back into having the chain of command supporting us. The Marines and I sitting around a table came up with “What if we shoot our ten rounds back at them and then we waited about four minutes for the mortar team to come back and make their corrections, and we shoot another ten rounds, proximity burst?” And we’re like, that might do it! But it had to be approved. We sent it up. We said, “We know they’re there. This is the point of origin. We know the teams are setting up away from the urban areas, because they know we shoot ten rounds back. They don’t set up in urban areas because our ten rounds would then have civilian casualties, and they don’t want to deal with that type of bad reaction from the local, so they’re setting up in the field.” And I sent up, I said, “Hey, we need to be able to do this. We want to go ahead and shoot ten rounds, and then shoot another ten rounds, proximity burst.” And the request went up, and initially it was denied for some very good reasons. At the time again the ROE was what it was. But the other aspect of having the fire truck blow up was you started getting a lot of support. And we sent that request up again, and they approved it. Because we were just getting surrounded. And we did it; we got it approved. The after action was, you guys killed the mortar team, and it was a mortar team.

We did it one more time. We asked again on the north side of the city. It turned out to be an outside element that didn’t get the word. We did it again; we killed the mortar team. And we got that information directly, and we never took a mortar again for four months. But that was Marines who had been on post for four hours in 120 degrees, who’ve done it 50 times, still being aware of what’s going on around them. It was Marines being disciplined. And it was also Marines at the lance corporal, corporal level understanding at a strategic level and being able to talk to it.

Jones: Well, very good scoop. Very well done! Greatly appreciate it. I’d like to have you now, we can put that DVD on and I’d like you to walk through that just to, just if you would, we can put the camera on the DVD and then we can have you just talk to it very briefly Frank.

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Diorio: What we are looking at on the screen is the port of entry on the Syrian/Iraqi border. Camp Gannon is the area directly on the screen to the front. To the right where most of the explosions took place, you will see the point of entry area. Behind it is the tower that Lance Corporal Butler was in.

These are company building spaces right here. My CP is right in the middle of these building spaces. What we’ll hear initially is the narrator’s voice on the video. The day af-

ter the attack occurred, this video was posted 24 hours later on a website. It was sent to me by then Captain Andy Nelson, who I had turned over Camp Gannon with. The translation of the narrator is roughly that *This is going to be a great attack against the Americans. This will be a victory for Allah. This will be a victory against the Coalition, and this will be a victory in which we free Iraq from the American oppressors.* The interesting thing about this is that the results turned out to be just the opposite. This video would spur on locals eventually to side with Marines to try to free the locals from oppression of the foreign influence and foreign fighters.

What you'll see is they film the actual ride. There are three SVBIEDs. You'll see the ride to Camp Gannon. They film it as they drive there. They are highlighting here [points to the title on the screen] that one of the drivers was a Lebanese man. The first vehicle is a small van that off camera, off screen will take a right and hit the platoon position. This is followed by a vehicle that works as a breaching vehicle to push our barrier plan out of the way over in this area right here.

Then you'll see a larger SUV truck follow the explosives and take that left. The explosion of the white SUV truck, you'll see, worked as reconnaissance for the fire truck. So one vehicle comes and turns right after the breaching vehicle comes through, and the next one will turn left. You'll see that explosion. Then a fire truck comes from behind and follows it in.

Lance Corporal Butler is in this vicinity. He has direct fire with the vehicles, which causes the windshield to shatter and forces the driver to take a left instead of a right. If they had taken a right they would have gone right there past Butler into our CP where I was. All in all though, the base was within 250 meters of the blast. Butler was probably 50–60 meters from the blast in the platoon position.

So you'll see the first detonation. You'll see the reverberation through the camp. You won't see the explosion, but you'll see the dust come up...that's over here.

The second explosion is the truck in the point of entry.

And then the last explosion you'll see is the fire truck exploding from about a mile away. The person filming is filming from southeast of Camp Gannon along the main north/south road along the east side of Camp Gannon, so he's about three quarters of a mile away as he's filming it. We are going to go ahead and start it.

What you'll hear throughout is a large fire fight. The Marines who survived the initial blast kept their ground, and they repelled the attack. They are driving in...the vehicle [points to moving white SUV]. This is the road that they planned to assault across. Up there is the north end and that's the firefight between them and the Marines repelling that attack.

This is a video from the insurgents' perspective. The insurgents actually filmed this video. It was taken on the day of the action. The date on here is actually wrong. It was April 11th, just as the sun was coming up. There is a north/south road along the east part of Camp Gannon. Just before the sun rose, the insurgents came in, and they removed all the local civilians living on the east side of the road. The insurgents came in and took up positions directly across from Camp Gannon. At that point they were about 250 meters from the main base and 50 or 60 meters from the supplemental position, the platoon position. You'll hear most of the fire fight is between the insurgents whose plan was to literally run across the streets after the initial explosions to try to gain ground on Camp Gannon. What you'll hear back is the outgoing fire of the Marines who held their ground despite the explosion and fought back to a great success.

**Table A-1. Units Responsible for Al Qaim**

Deployment Dates	Unit Commander	Unit
March–4 May 2003		CJSOTF-W
4 May 2003–March 2004	LTC William Dolan	1 <sup>st</sup> Sq/3A CR
March–22 Sept 2004	LtCol Matt Lopez	3/4 Marines
22 Sept 2004–25 March 2005	LtCol Chris Woodbridge	1/7 Marines
March 2005–10 Sept 2005	LtCol Timothy Mundy	3/2 Marines
Sept 2005–16 March 2006	LtCol Julian Alford	3/6 Marines
March 2006–11 Sept 2006	LtCol Nicholas Marano	1/7 Marines
Sept 2006–28 April 2007	LtCol Scott Schuster	3/4 Marines
28 April 2007–7 Nov 2007	LtCol Jason Bohm	1/4 Marines
1 Nov 2007–5 May 2008	LtCol Peter Baumgarten	3/2 Marines
5 May 2008–9 Nov 2008	LtCol Steven Grass	2/2 Marines





8 April 2011

Subject: Colonel Dale Alford's Presentation on COIN in Iraq

On 16 February 2010, Colonel Dale Alford, USMC briefed members of IDA on Iraq. From August 2005 to April 2006, then-LtCol Dale Alford commanded 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6th Marines (3/6 Marines) in Al Qaim. The following are some of the slides and the transcript from that briefing.

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Colonel Alford: We arrived in Iraq the third week in August of '05, and we left there about the end of March first of April '06 timeframe. Al Qaim is really five towns—Al Qaim is a district, we don't talk about districts in Iraq like we do in Afghanistan, but Al Qaim is a district, it's an area; it's not a city. Unlike Fallujah or Ramadi, which are cities [and districts], Al Qaim is a conglomeration of five—I'll call them towns—of somewhere between 150,000 to 200,000 people in the Al Qaim district [01:17].



**Figure A-7. Introduction**

[Figure A-7] You may recall that back in the July '05 timeframe, Ollie North was with 3/2 Marines and there were two very kinetic, 4–5-day operations where they went into the cities of Al Qaim. Additionally, there was what the unit we replaced called, “Red on Red.” When I asked them what that meant, they would say, “Well, they’re fighting amongst themselves up there.” What was happening was, there were two or three tribes that decided that Al Qaeda was not the team they wanted to be on; for a number of reasons. Al Qaeda had been driven out of Fallujah, they had regrouped in

Al Qaim, which they were using it as a base of operations, Zarqawi was supposedly out there, they had pretty much put a stake in the ground and said, “This is ours.”

They were doing a few things that disturbed the tribes. One, they were taking and marrying the tribesman's women, they were taking their houses, and some of the houses in Al Qaim were huge, 5,000–square-foot homes—Italian marble, giant mirrors, 20–30-foot ceilings—beautiful homes. Why was that? [How did they get the money for those types of homes?] The reason is it's a smuggling town. That's the trade route, that's the old Silk

Road. It came right through Al Qaim and into Syria and over to the Mediterranean Sea. They [Al Qaeda] were taking over these people's smuggling routes—their livelihoods. Bottom line, it pissed them off! And they started fighting back against Al Qaeda. [03:12]

As a group, four of us went over July 1st through the 4th, and did our pre-deployment site survey. When we got back we came up with a plan to move into the city, come hell or high water, we were taking it back and we weren't going to live on a big base. I remember telling Colonel Davis that as I was leaving. Me and Colonel Davis go back a long way; [and now] he was Regimental Commander for 2nd Marine Regiments, RCT-2 [Regimental Combat Team-2]. I remember telling him when I came back, "I'm moving into the city." He's like, "Alright Big Boy, we'll see you when you get back." Our relationship went back to when I was a first lieutenant; we served together in 2/4 Marines, we also served together three years at Parris Island, so we knew each other well. So he allowed us to do what we planned to do, and he ran top cover for us, because originally it was not their plan for us to move into the city.

So, that sets the stage for our arrival.

The center of gravity, it's the people stupid! [Figure A-8] When we got there, the center of gravity was the enemy. They were trying to figure out how to kill bad guys. [5:00]

It's important to understand your enemy in order to protect the population. You've got to know who you are up against, and who you are trying to protect the population from. The number one enemy was the Sunni insurgency, not Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda was out there, but they were fueling the Sunni insurgency. That insurgency began to change in the fall of 2005, because of the things I just talked about, they decided to pick our side vice the other side—Al Qaeda and the foreign fighters. We had seven suicide car bombs in our seven months; all seven of them were foreigners. They were not the local Iraqi's blowing themselves up.

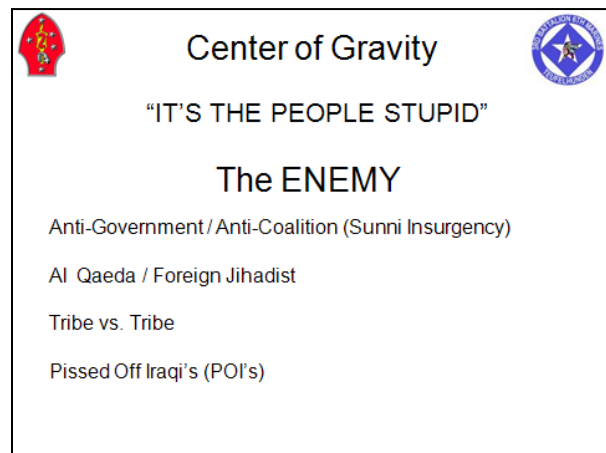
We also had to figure out how to deal with “tribe on tribe.” Some tribes had rejected Al Qaeda and were fighting Al Qaeda, and there were a couple of tribes supporting Al Qaeda. So those tribes were fighting each other, and that was the Red-on-Red that the unit before us was talking about. [06:11]

The number one group that you had to deal with, was POIs—Pissed of Iraqi’s—which we made every day by the actions we were taking: Escalation of

force, the way we were dealing with locals, the way we were using bombs, and this evolved into what you see now, what’s going on in Marjah in Afghanistan, where we dropped a bomb and killed some civilians and it’s huge news for a few days. Hell, that was commonplace in 2004 and 2005 in Iraq. *We were making insurgents!* So that was the number one group that we had to figure out—how *not* to make those the enemy.

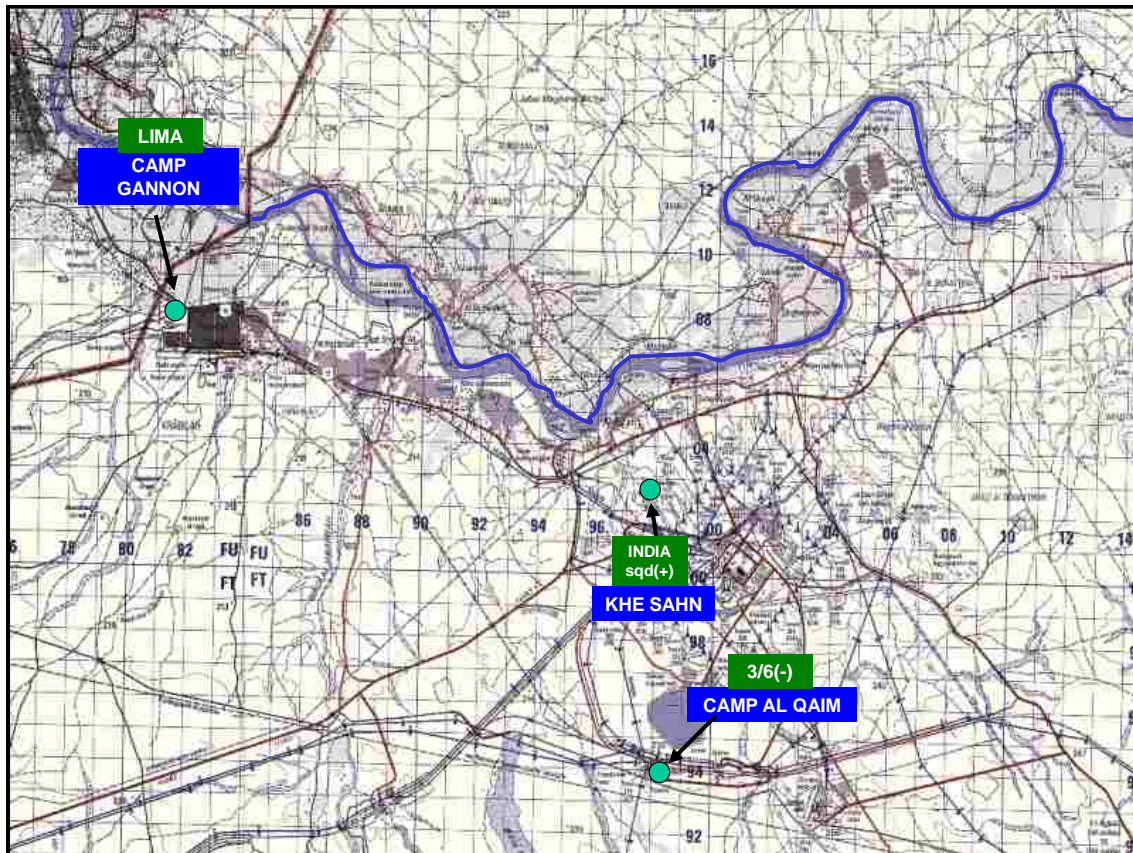
That’s what you’ve got to do. You’ve got to figure out who needs killing and who does not. The problem is we want to shoot at all of them. You know a guy shoots at me and I am shooting back at him, I don’t care who he is, right? That’s not the right answer, even though some of my Marines were that way when we first got there. One of my company commanders says that on video. “I don’t really know who it is, but they’re shooting at me so I am shooting back.” Wrong answer! He ended up becoming my best counter-insurgent. The cut line is between those two, who needs shooting at and who does not.

When we got there, we TOA’d, transfer of authority, on September 10. [Figure A-9] At Al Qaim was a train station, about 15–18 clicks south of the river line, which is where the towns are, the five towns that I talked about, about 900–1,000 Marines lived there. [8:00] Khe Sahn was nothing more than a retrans [radio retransmission] site. Located at Camp Gannon out on the Syrian Border was a company reinforced. When I got out there that was the best damn defense I’ve ever seen built in my career. It took over 100 Marines to guard that thing in a 24-hour period. The unit we replaced was shooting at bad guys every single day in the major town of Husaybah.



**Figure A-8. Center of Gravity**

This retrans site was set up so this dot could talk to this dot [pointing at the map and indicating that the retrans site allowed one unit to talk to another]. And this dot would drive out through the desert for a number of hours in order to deliver food, water, and bullets to this dot. And that was kind of the mode of operation at the time. The battalion that we replaced was missing a company during most of their deployment. Five months out of their deployment there was a company that was back guarding Al Asad.



**Figure A-9. Disposition of Forces at Transfer of Authority**

Additionally, they didn't have Iraqis with them. There were a number of reasons why this battalion was not able to get into the city. They attacked into the city a couple of times, two operations during their seven months, but this was a completely stagnant and reactionary set up. We were a little bigger. [9:33] One of the things about 3/6 that was very important: this battalion that deployed to Iraq is essentially the same battalion that did seven months together in Afghanistan in 2004. I took 950 Marines to Afghanistan, and I took about 700 of those 950 back to Iraq eight months later. That makes a huge difference on the way you operate, so this battalion, NCOs [non-commissioned officers],



and officers had fought together in Afghanistan the year before...same battalion commander, same company commanders, same first sergeants, all the NCOs. That is one of the reasons why we did as well as we did. [10:26]

That is the setting as we entered Iraq and prepared for Operation IRON FIST.

After taking over the retrans site and Khe Sahn, we restructured Gannon. What took 100 Marines to do before we arrived now took about 50. Essentially, we were able to cut Camp Gannon in half. We took an old bulldozer and started pushing down the post and re-configuring it to be more efficient. I could pull that company, LIMA Company, out of there for the most part, except for a reinforced platoon, and use LIMA Company in IRON FIST.

We executed Operation IRON FIST from 1–7 October 2005; a battalion-size operation, attacking from east to west [see Line of Attack arrow in Figure A-10]; it was about a seven-day operation.

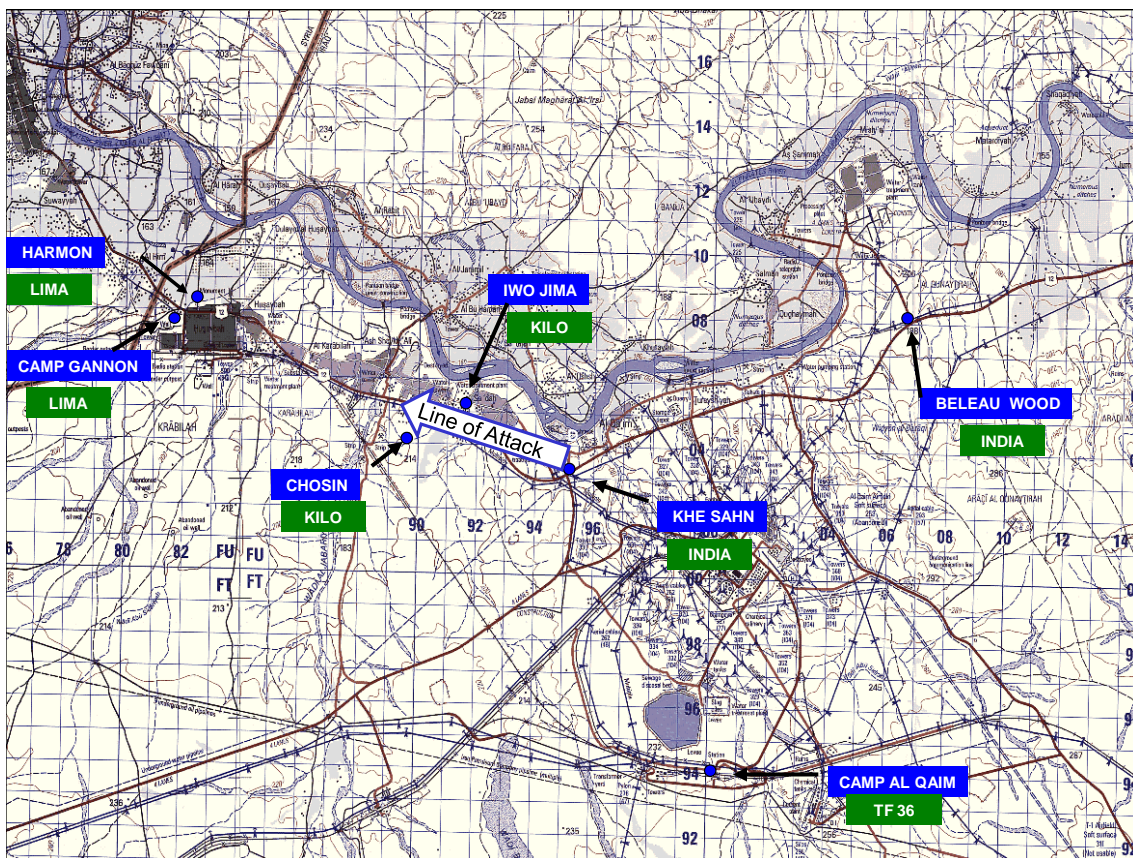


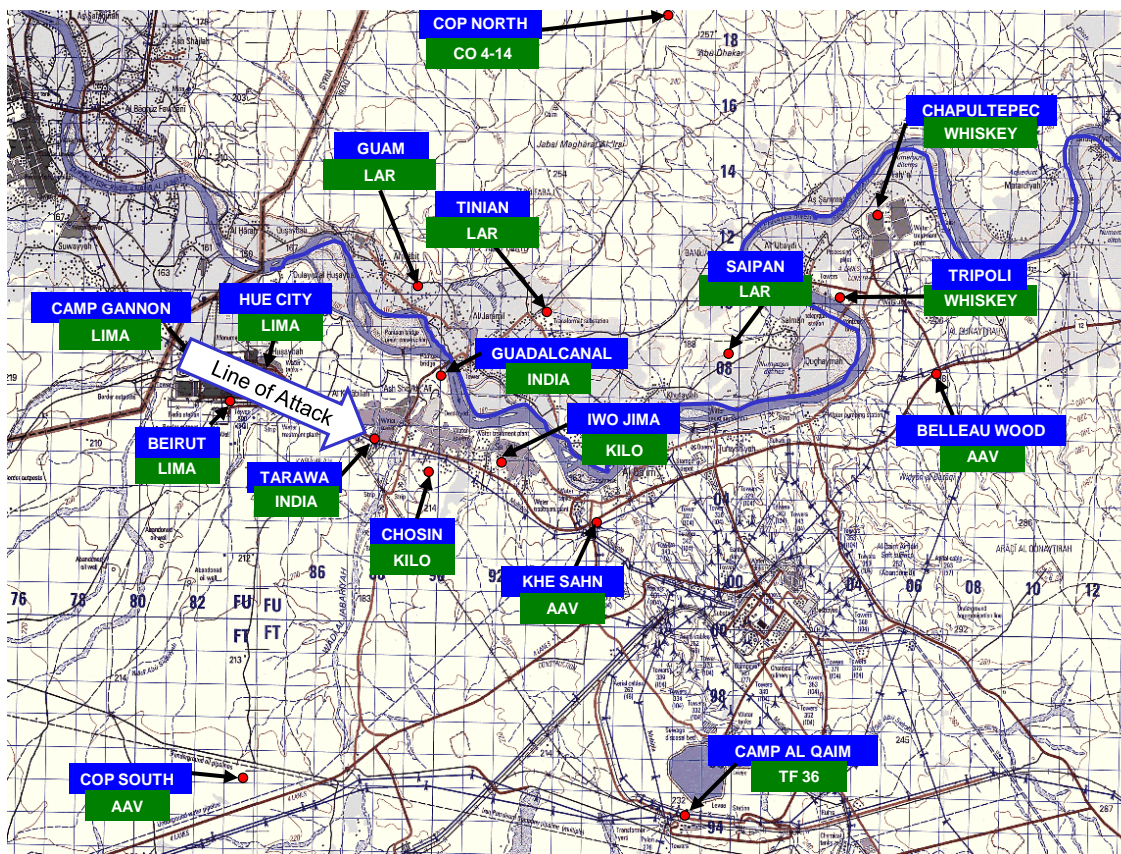
Figure A-10. 3/6 Marines Disposition after Operation IRON FIST, 7 October 2005

Next we attacked through the town of Sadah and eastern Karabila, and we stopped at a wadi right here [tip of the arrow in Figure A-10]; and that was about a seven-day operation. And we built these four positions [Chosin, Iwo Jima, Belleau Wood, and built up Khe Sahn] and left Marines in place. Once you move into the city, you are not leaving. That was kind of the beginning. I will show you what those looked like, and I still preach this, and still see this as you will go into Afghanistan in places, people still aren't doing this; if you are listening on the news, they're talking about what the Marines are going to do in Marjah. What are they saying? At least 2,000 Marines and another couple of thousand Afghans are going to stay in Marjah. I heard that this morning on the news. What's that mean? That means that two battalions are going to stay in Marjah; 3/6 and 1/6. So, we're doing it. There are other units who are still not doing it, and nobody was doing it at this time.

People ask, "Where'd you come up with this concept?" I don't really know. I can go back in books that I read as young lieutenant and captain, like *First to Fight*. If you read one of the last chapters in *First to Fight*, General Krulak talks about this. When he briefed the president on this, he got escorted out of the president's office, basically being told, "You know, I hear you, but we aren't doing that."

The Marines were doing this back in Vietnam in '67 or '68 before we really started doing it in '69, '70, '71 under General Abrams. This was before the COIN Manual came out in the Fall of 2006. What I'm saying is this is nothing new. It is just protecting the population, in order to do that you've got to live where the population is, and that's what we were trying to accomplish. IRON FIST was nothing more than an operation to get into the people, to kick the bad guys out, establish ourselves, and stay. [13:46]

STEEL CURTAIN was the next operation and it went from 5 November to 20 November, and that was a regiment-size operation; two battalions to clear. [Figure A-11] 1<sup>st</sup> LAR [light armored reconnaissance] took over my positions and relieved the Marines I had in the positions so we didn't give up those positions. We moved through the desert [to the south of the Main Route]. We moved the whole battalion along with 2/1, the BLT that came from the MEU, through the desert during the night, during that night's sand storm, came into Camp Gannon, and the morning of the 5th we attacked out, and attacked from west to east [see Line of Attack arrow in Figure A-11], caught the bad guys off guard, pointing the other way. We cleared the rest of it and then we went up into Ubaydi and cleared it.



**Figure A-11. 3/6 Marines Disposition After Operation STEEL CURTAIN (20 November 2005)**

Basically, we came through the desert, attacked back, and met up, crossing this bridge right here [on the wadi] was a huge event, walking across that bridge, I mean the whole town was completely littered with IEDs. It reminds me of what is going on in Marjah right now. If you see what is going on in Marjah there is not a whole lot of big fighting. There are pockets of resistance and the reason the Marines are moving so slow is they have to clear IEDs. It took us and the 2/1 two weeks to clear this area due to the amount of IEDs that they had rigged. Every street, every bridge, every alley way, was completely rigged and we lost a number of Marines from both battalions to IEDs, stepping on pressure plates. This is the same situation you are seeing in Marjah right now. You have to infiltrate and swallow up the town, and stay. [15:41]

This [Figure A-11] is what we looked like when we were done and each one of these dots, this is Ubaydi up here [northeast of map, with Chapultepec and Tripoli] we went up and took it in the later part of the operation from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> or so, each one of those dots represents a platoon position, and each one of those dots had Iraqis in them,

either a platoon of Iraqi soldiers or a company of Iraqi soldiers. Then from there, we started making police stations over the next five months. We just saturated and swallowed up the Al Qaim region and made it where the bad guys could not operate, so therefore, we took advantage of what the tribes had already started in the summer and they picked our side. It is as simple as that. It is no different than what needs to be done in Afghanistan. You just have to have enough people to do that and to pick the right areas to do that; and you have got to show the people that you are not leaving. We will talk about how we did that as we move along.

Alright, [Figure A-12] six focuses of efforts. Once we got in there, the number one focus of effort: the Iraqi Army, bar none! Everything we did focused on the Iraqi Army. We called what we were doing CAP, but it's the Combined Action Platoon, a little different than Vietnam, Combined Action Program; Combined Action is nothing more than Iraqi soldiers and Marines living together, eating together, crapping together.

- Iraqi Army
- Combined Action Platoons (CAPs)
- Build and Support Iraqi Police Force
- Build the Local Leadership / Live with the people
- Civil Affairs and Reconstruction
- Continue to stay in the face of the Insurgency

**Figure A-12. 3/6 Focus of Efforts**

We started building a police force because the tribes started giving us men and we sent them to a police academy and we built the police force. Identifying the local leadership by doing ASCOPE. I had no idea what ASCOPE [Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations, People, Events] was back then, but ASCOPE is what we were doing; and that's Annex B of the COIN Manual. It's how to do IPB in COIN—Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield in COIN is ASCOPE.

We were doing that with the local leadership, living amongst the people. Civil affairs and reconstruction. I was fortunate enough to have a five-man Civil Affairs team, and I linked up each one, one Civil Affairs guy to each one of my five companies, that were collocated with each one of the five tribes in each one of the five towns, so it really worked out well. Then, you always have to stay in the face of insurgency, because they are always trying to get back in once you take it away from them. You can never forget



about that piece, but that's the least most important, and these are in orders of importance. [18:41-19:50]

We'll go through each one real quick. [Figure A-13] Iraqi Army, the main effort, I mean we trained them from the platoon, squad, company up to the battalion staff, and even the brigade. I would bring the brigade commander into my office. I had internet, a civilian internet; I gave him a computer. We took down all the signs where it said, "No Foreigners Allowed", and "Secret." It drove my 2 crazy! Left

up all the maps, had up all the guys we were trying to find and kill, right? Open Kimono to my Iraqi counterpart who was Colonel Razak and now General Razak. 1/1, First Brigade, First Iraqi Division, the fire brigade, they fought in Fallujah, they fought in Mosul, they fought all over. But we brought them into the fold—that was the key. [19:50-22:13]

One of the major problems was logistics. There was gnashing of teeth about it. Every month there was a fourth of the brigade that was going to be gone, they went on leave for seven days out of the month, you break that up into a fourth, that's four weeks in a month right, so a fourth of the brigade was always gone. How were we going to get 1/1 from Al Qaim all the way to the southeast side of the Baghdad where the Headquarters was in order for them to draw their money and then take it home to their families? We talked about planes, trains, and automobiles, everything right? It was, "How are we going to do this?" Finally I just said, "Stop" to Col Davis, I said, "I will do it!" [20:38]

If the Iraqi Army is the most important thing we were doing, which the president was saying at that time, they stand up we stand down, then you've got to put your money where your mouth is. If the most important thing is the Iraqi Army, then about December, end of STEEL CURTAIN, they became the focus of effort, period! If it didn't have to do with the Iraqi Army, I didn't want to hear it. So, I put together about a ten-vehicle, heavy guns platoon, and they drove 14 hours every week, one way. If you think about

- **Iraqi Army**
  - The Main Effort to influence success in AO
    - Training - Sq, Plt, Co, Bn Staff
    - Put an Iraqi face out front, IA in the lead
    - Support by all means possible
      - Logistically
      - Operationally
    - Recruiting effort.
      - Continuously engage Sheikhs to support their Army
      - Increase Sunnis in Iraqi Army

**Figure A-13. Focus of Effort #1, Iraqi Army**

where they drove from Al Qaim down through Haditha, Hit, Baghdadi, around Ramadi, southwest side of Fallujah, down to the bottom side of Baghdad; dropped off about 200 soldiers in their trucks, drive back, 14 hours. Six days later pick up another 200 and drive them 14 hours, drop them off, pick up the ones you dropped the week before and drive them back. They did that for three straight months, because that was the most important thing we were doing. Everybody was trying to figure out how we are going to do away with this leave thing with the Iraqi Army; we're not; that's their culture, accept it. Figure out how you're going to do support it. I think that was a huge piece. And Razak became my best friend. [22:15]

Then we began to recruit, because 1/1, was for the most part a Shia Brigade, commanded mostly by Sunnis, but was Shia soldiers in a Sunni area. And we convinced, literally, General Casey, to stand up 3/7, third brigade a local brigade of the 7 Division. Over a 1000 men in the brigade were from the Al Qaim region. That was a huge piece. With the promise that 1/1 would go back to the east side, so first division would have the eastern half of Al Anbar and 7 division have the western half. By standing up 3/7 we were able to do that and send 1/1 back in the February time frame. That was a huge piece, and the Sheikhs committed men to it, and then they committed men to the police force.

Again, not the same as Vietnam, the CAP, Combined Action Platoons, [Figure A-14] everything was based on the platoon size. I don't believe that we could have done this down to the squad level; even though, in Afghanistan, back in November, I saw 1/5 breaking down to the squad level, so every circumstance is different. At this time, platoon, and why do I say that? I mean in a

platoon you've got the leadership, you've got a lieutenant who's a little older and been through college, you've got a staff NCO who's got 10–12 years in the Marine Corps, you've got squad leaders. You know you can't just stick a squad out there, it's not like an ODA [operational detachment alpha] team, you don't have the experience at the Marine squad, but a platoon could just about do anything, especially when you put Iraqi soldiers

- **Combined Actions Platoons**
  - Not the same as the Vietnam model.
    - Based on platoon size force.
    - USMC and Iraqi Army (IA) elements paired together to support specific areas.
      - Live, eat and work together
    - Each patrol and operation has USMC and IA mix.
    - Shared intelligence collection
    - Match their strengths with ours.

**Figure A-14. Focus of Effort #2,  
Combined Action Platoons**

with it; which we were able to do. We did everything together; we ate together, lived together.

If I found a lieutenant who had a squad or something out that didn't have Iraqi soldiers with him, I'd send him back to Al Qaim. You just did not do it without Iraqis. You do not do anything without Iraqis with you. Nothing. Period! And you go around and you preached the word and they believe and then it happens. [25:00-25:44] Our strength was our fire support, our mobility, or intelligence collection, through machines, matched with their strengths—which is the local language, being able to interact with the people, and all those things that being from there, even though many of the soldiers were Shia not Sunni, that they could bring was huge—and to be able to mix those two. In order to do that though, you've got to open the kimono up a little bit. Your Intel guys can't drive the show. You got to tell Intel guys to, "sit down and shut up! I thank you for your advice, but I'm the commander and this is what we're doing." Kind of the same thing with lawyers. [25:45-29:28]

I will show you a couple of examples of these dots. You've seen the 17 dots. This is a platoon position [see Figure A-15]. This bunker here is where the Marines lived, and this bunker here is where the Iraqi soldiers lived. Marine shitters, Iraqi shitters, why do we have two different shitters with the Marines and the Iraqis—anybody know? I will tell you a quick story. I'll tell you why.



**Figure A-15. Battle Position Beirut**



**Figure A-16. Battle Position Tarawa**

Sergeant Taddy, a Bronze Star winner from the tour before in Afghanistan, just one of my best sergeants, he's a football coach up in Ohio now, but a squad leader at the time. It was his squad's turn to clean the crappers, and they're 55 gallon drums cut in half, right? Pull them out, you've got to pour fuel in them, stir them, well you know we don't have to do that anymore, you know why? We've got wag bags now, I mean God invented wag bags for Marines—they are unbelievable right?! You crap in them, you zip them up, the thing turns to like wood, you throw it in the fire and it burns up and doesn't stink. It's amazing! But, back then, five years ago, we're having the old Vietnam way.

Well he goes into his crappers and there's crap all over the ceiling, the walls, all over the seat, everywhere! He's been telling these guys over and over, you know because they stand up when they crap, and they clean themselves with water, and not paper, right. So, Sergeant Taddy is all pissed off, so he pours the diesel fuel all over the shitter and sets it on fire! First sergeant brings him in to me, NJP [non-judicial punishment], and this is one of my best sergeants!

I'm like, "Sergeant Taddy, what are you doing?!"

He's like, "Well Sir, you know..." now he's belligerent, right? He's like, "I am not doing it! I've told them, I've taught, I've showed them; I'm not doing it! I'm fed up with them! But," he said, "I've got a solution!"

Smart guy, supposed to be getting a NJP, and I said, "What is that?"

And this is why we're going to win this kind of war, if you allow corporals and sergeants and lieutenants to talk to officers and come up with solutions. This solution right here is an example of that; and I talked to the lieutenants about that when I talk to them, and NCOs.

Sergeant Taddy says, "I've got a solution Sir! You build the crapper a little taller, you cut the whole the same size as the 55 gallon drum, you paint yellow footprints on each side of it so they know to put their feet over it, and they straddle it and they crap in the bucket, and it doesn't hit anything, right?! Because the hole that we crap in is this big, and not the size of a 55 gallon drum." He says, "But you still have a problem."

"What's that?" I asked.

He says, "Because they wash themselves with water, the thing is full of water so it won't burn!"

"So how do you get rid of it?"

He said “What you do is, we dig a six foot hole, and fill it halfway with gravel.” You see this is all gravel, and this was a huge project to get gravel, but that’s a whole other story.

“What you do is you fill half the hole up with gravel, three feet of gravel, and you pull the 55 gallon drum out, you pour into the hole with the gravel, all the water runs through the gravel, and you burn the crap on top of the gravel.”

I’m like, “You’re brilliant,” and I tear up the NJP.

I pissed off the first sergeant because I didn’t charge him, but NCOs coming up with solutions in COIN is the key to being successful. As officers we’ve got to allow them to do that. It’s amazing the things that they’ll be able to fix, their “eats on streets,” patrolling from meal to meal, all these stories I tell, I didn’t come up with any of these things, it’s all young Marines, and mostly NCOs, that are out there doing it. [29:30]

Here’s another position; this was a company position. [see Figure A-16] I was taking these pictures from a Huey that I actually crashed in! They called it a hard landing, I call it a crash. The tail broke off, I mean the tail rotor.

You can see it this is nothing more than HESCO walls and you walk out and you are amongst the people; you’re living in the village.

They are all built this way. [29:57]

Here’s one of the first ones [Figure A-17]. Here’s the one where Sergeant Taddy burned the crappers down, in this one, in Iwo Jima - Kilo Company.

As you see walking down here you are in the village; Iraqis, Marines, mortars, and then Joint COC [Company Operations Center].

Just more pictures; this is Khe Sahn [Figure A-18], which is that dot that we moved down, we took that intersection. What I used my AAVs [Amphibious Assault Vehicle] for [were check points]. They did not go out into the town. They ran the two check points. We started trying to close down these check points after two or three months, and the Sheikh said, “No, no we want them. We want to keep them.”

There would be cars lined up as far as you could see! These are the most patient people in the world, and you’d think, now if this was in America, another cultural thing, we’d just be livid, pissed off, that we had to wait...they liked it. They socialized while they waited. So they kept these check points up. My AAV Company ran those and this is just one of their positions. [31:02]

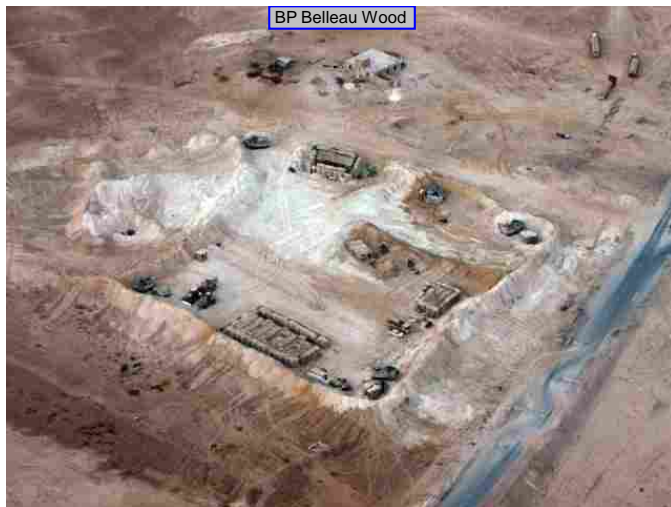


**Figure A-17. Battle Position Iwo Jima**



**Figure A-18. Battle Position Khe Sahn**

This is another one, Belleau Wood [Figure A-19], and another AAV checkpoint position. Here's one that was across the river. [See Figure A-20] A whole entire Iraqi Company was in this one, with a platoon of Marines. The town was just right off of the map there, right across that field. So we tried to take areas, and not take farm areas, we didn't take anybody's houses, it was very important.



**Figure A-19. Battle Position Belleau Wood**



**Figure A-20. Battle Position Guam**

You know, I used to think, an empty house was empty for a reason, especially in Al Qaim, and we would take over these houses and it would piss off everybody because you are taking the houses. These houses are empty because the people had left, because they were afraid for their lives. Most went to Syria or Jordan. The people of the area protected

the house and they didn't move in the house, and they didn't go into them and take all their stuff. If you go into these houses they would be full of furniture, all the dishes, everything would still be there. We would go in and push it all aside and break stuff up, and live in them, we being the Americans throughout the country.

We decided we'd take no houses, so we built our own positions, we lived in bunkers, all these are HESCO bunkers, as you can see [pointing to structures in Figure A-21]. There are eight Marines, there are four bunk beds inside one of these. Put sand bags on top, put a HESCO in front for a blast wall, we ended up putting HVACs in them. We used kerosene heaters during the winter, and then we ended up putting air conditioners in these things. This is how we lived. This is how you've got to live in order to be amongst the people. You can't be in those big FOBs [forward operating bases] with KBR [Kellogg, Brown and Root], the Internet, and all the different things that we were doing. You have got to split up and be where you can protect the population 24/7. [33:02]

Focus of Effort #3 [see Figure A-21]. We built the police force and the Sheikh supported this. We ended up building four police stations.

Who really took this to the next level

was 1/7 Marines commanded by LtCol Nick Marano. By the time we were turning over with Nick and 1/7, we had about 580 policemen that we'd sent to the police academy. We were putting squads with them, and he ended up putting up whole platoons and really bringing this police force up to over a 1,000 policemen in the Al Qaim region. They policed themselves and the Sheikhs got behind it.

So, how do you get this going? It's local policemen, but they were armed too. When they first got there, they were kind of a paramilitary unit because they had to be able to beat the insurgency, and you gave them backbone by making sure that Marines were with them 24/7. We're doing some of that in Afghanistan, and it has to be done, but it is not being done nearly enough.

An Army MP Platoon that we had with us was huge in helping set this up to train them. They were the PMTs [Police Mentoring Teams], they were the experts that went around

- **Iraqi Police Force**

- Build from ground up with Sheikhs support
- Rebuild key infrastructure/4 Police Stations
- Equipped, Supplied, Supported by MOI
- Police Transition Team, Army MP Plt
- Integration of Marine Squad, IA Squad and IP Squad

**Figure A-21. Focus of Effort #3, Iraqi Police Force**



helping the Marines train. It was kind of like the LEP [Law Enforcement program] program now that we're doing with civilians.

The focus of Effort #4 was Local population and the leadership [see Figure A-22]. I had, a guy by the name of Ed Rueda, a major, he was a RAO [Regional Affairs Officer], he wasn't a FAO [Foreign Area Officer] because he didn't speak fluent Arabic. I got him attached to me, and he knew the tribes! He's written some articles talking about the tribes. He recommended the exact opposite of what most people would think: you absolutely treat all the tribes, the five tribes in the area, the same. It's the exact opposite of the way Saddam always did. What he would do is, he would give all his money and assets to one tribe make them the powerful ones, and they would control the other ones. It was the "have and have nots." [35:12]

- **Interaction with Local Leadership and live among the people.**

- Engage important people at all levels of command Plt, Co, Bn
  - Sheikhs – Tribal (all inclusive)
  - Imams – Religious
  - City Council - Governmental
- Meetings every two weeks with Sheiks/Imams
- Meeting every week with the City Council.
- Visit homes of influential people on regular basis.
- Conduct Census of Population
- Eat off the local economy/Intel

**Figure A-22. Focus of Effort #4**

As an example, we got a guy who wanted to be the mayor,

Mayor Farhan who's still there, so we called a meeting with all the tribal leaders. When we got there, Rueda was already there and figured out that only three of the five tribes showed. The two that didn't show were the ones who supported Al Qaeda and they were afraid. So, he came to me and said, "Hey Sir, do not deal with these three tribes until you get all five. Go in, ask for the representative from all five tribes and when the other two don't stand up, pick your stuff up and leave."

That was his recommendation. That is exactly what I did. When only the three of the five tribes showed up, I gathered my crap, told my guys, "We're leaving." I told Mayor Farhan, "When you get all five you call me and we'll deal. You aren't getting anything until then." About a week later one of the company commanders came to me and said, "Mayor Farhan has them all." I show up and he had four of the five, the Samani tribe is the one that didn't show that time. I did the same thing, I picked my stuff up and I left. A few days later he had all five, and then we started dealing. [36:36-37:41]



Another thing we did was make sure we didn't give any one tribe more than any other. That was hard to do with the Albu Mahals because they were the biggest and they were the ones who took the biggest risk at the beginning. They are the ones who believed that they started the Awakening. The Albu Mahals are getting some credit now, but at the time, they were pissed. In the 2006–2007 time frame, they weren't getting any credit for starting this thing. There are now a number of books giving them credit, and that's all they wanted. But to not favor them was hard. My favorite Sheikh, Sheikh Kurdhi, Albu-Mahal. I say that now, but at that time he was a good guy, could speak English, was educated, he understood what was going on and I really liked him, so it was hard not to favor him. But, Ed, Major Rueda was constantly on me about that, not to favor one over the other.

We would meet with the Sheikhs every two weeks, we had a city council meeting every week, and they built their own city council, we let them build it. You know Mayor Farhan was the mayor for about a year-and-a-half and never got paid. Why? Because he was a former colonel in the Iraqi Army so he was de-Bathified, they wouldn't recognize him. But the tribes paid him. The tribes took care of him, and he was diligent about staying there and now he's the real Mayor and getting paid and so forth. Nick has brought him to the United States, and they did a city-to-city, the Al Qaim region with Orange County as a sister city, sister county/district type thing.

I spent a lot of my time visiting homes, and when you go do a visit, that's a four- or five-hour endeavor. You're going to smoke a lot of bad cigarettes, eat some sheep, and drink a lot of tea. That wasn't easy for me in the beginning. You know, I'm an impatient person; I'm ready to get down to business. But you understood pretty quickly that attitude would get you absolutely nowhere, except maybe killed. I never went into anybody's home with either my gear on or a weapon. Never! I always took my boots off, took all my gear off and weapon off and left them in the vehicle. If they killed me inside that house, I had 40 Marines and my PSD [personal security detachment] that was just going to destroy them in a heartbeat, and they knew it. So, if they killed me, they were all going to die in a very quick hurry. That sent a message. Walking in completely unarmed is something that it is not in our culture to do in a war, in the military. I think it's important. [39:55]

And then, this one became important [last bullet of Figure A-22], eating off the local economy—I talk about census patrols too—but eating off the local economy. When the Marines began to eat, shops started popping up everywhere...sheep kabobs. I said goat before, you know, you eat goat in Afghanistan, especially eastern Afghanistan. In Iraq, poor people eat goat. People of any stature eat sheep. I was told that real quickly because

I had just come from Afghanistan where I ate a lot of goat the year before, so I was asking for goat.

And they would feed you, if the Sheikh would feed you, he would take the meat out of the elbows and the joints, that was the best meat, and that would mean you were special, if they fed you with their hands...as long as it wasn't their left hand.

And I could hug with the best of them too buddy. You got to do a lot of hand holding and hugging. You've got to be comfortable with it even though that's not our culture.

We started getting to where it was like a pizza joint. You could order sheep kabobs. Marines would order them, and they would deliver to the positions in a plastic sack, like you get in a grocery store. It had flat bread, sheep and some vegetables in it. It would be like a dollar, two dollars, and Marines were eating that vice MREs because that's what they were on, MREs and UGRAs [Meals Ready to Eat and Unitized Group Ration A], which is kind of a big MRE. They really liked this. But what else did you really get? You started getting the same little boy bringing you stuff, and he start telling you things. You got intelligence off these people. And then Marines began to meet the old ladies. In Iraq, much more so than Afghanistan, the old women, once a woman goes through menopause, she can't have kids anymore, the veil comes off. And she runs the show in the neighborhoods. Not unlike many cities in any town, village in Philadelphia, or street in Philadelphia, you know the old women know everything. The Marines picked up on that real quick. And the old woman would tell them who was bad and who needed to go because they wanted their town cleaned up. They wanted a better life for their kids. And they would begin to feed the Marines, so the Marines began to figure out who was who, and they would patrol from meal to meal. All of a sudden I wasn't delivering UGRAs anymore because they weren't eating them; they were eating off of the local economy. [42:39]

We had an armored PX truck that would come around, every couple or three weeks, and they [the Marines] wanted three things on that PX truck. They wanted Copenhagen and cigarettes...tobacco. They wanted Creatine and Protein powder, because we put a 400-pound set of weights, a bench, and a squat rack in every one of those positions. If Marines can squat, bench, and dead lift and do cleans, and eat Creatine and Protein they got it. And then they wanted money. They wanted to be able to cash checks and to get money so they could eat off of the local economy...cheap. We needed a dispersing officer that could distribute money.

That's what they wanted: eat a lot of sheep, eat Creatine and Protein powder, and they came out of there all huge, you know, doing nothing but squats, dead lifts. Anytime they weren't out patrolling, they were slinging lead. That's all you need to keep Marines happy. You don't need internet, you don't need showers, you need good food...a lot of food for them, and some weights. Very important! [43:53]

The Civil Affairs Team [see Figure A-24] consisted of a Reserve lieutenant colonel, two warrant officers, and two captains, and they kind of paired up with each one of the five companies in the area of operations. I ended up with five companies: my three rifle companies—India, Lima and Kilo—a Weapons company (Whiskey Company) became a rifle company, and then I had a LAR [light armored reconnaissance] company. I had a sixth company, the Amtrak Company, but they were not in any town, and they were not linked up with any locals. They were running three check points. They were interacting with people but they weren't married up with a particular

- **Civil Affairs and Reconstruction**

- Electricity
- Water
- Sewage
- Schools
- Hospitals
- Roads / Bridges
- Rubble Removal/Jobs

**Figure A-23. Focus of Effort #5**

group of people, and they weren't in the villages. That's why I say I had five companies, and each one of these five civil affairs officers was partnered with that company commander. And you could start to see that company commander and that civil affairs officer become attached to their tribe, and in our meetings they would lobby for money and things for their tribe.

It was funny to watch them. It's the Stockholm syndrome, right? At the battalion-level, we had to make sure that we kept it even. But we worked kind of in that order [on Figure A-24]. Electricity, the first thing they want back is electricity—why? Why do the Iraqi people want electricity and the Afghans don't? The Afghans don't want electricity and they don't care about electricity in their houses, most of the rural Afghan, why? Because they never had it. Why was electricity the first thing the Iraqis wanted? Because they had it, and electricity is like crack: once you've had it, you've got to have it. Can you imagine your wife right now without electricity for the next four days? She'd be so pissed off

that you wouldn't want to go home. Electricity is very important and the Iraqis were that way, they wanted it back. We did it through generators and other different ways because we had destroyed all the transformers during the initial war. It took us a long time to figure that out and fix that. That fueled the insurgency. Pissed off old women without electricity make the husbands and their sons go out and shoot at us...POIs. Water and sewage were next. [46:25-46:55]

We created jobs and you'll see when you watch the film on STEEL CURTAIN, how badly we destroyed that town. Too much! If I had to do it over, I wouldn't have used nearly as many bombs. I argued with Col Davis on that. He believes the reason that they turned and picked our side is because we did go in so hard. There's an argument there. So, it'd be interesting to get his perspective on that.

See, I believe we could have destroyed much less. Very similar to what's happening in Marjah now. You just kind of engulf it slowly, infiltrate it, rather than destroy it and take it.

And the last one is the Bad Guys [see Figure A-24]. I mean they are always there, the border interdiction was huge, and they used the river. The Euphrates River was their highway; stopping them on that river was tough. And then at times, targeted raids with the Special Operation Forces I had out there with me in October, November, and December. And they're as

good as you've ever heard that they are, and as professional. They weren't cowboys. And the General Purpose Force working with a Special Operations Force is all about personality; it's all about building that relationship and working together. We were able to do that.

I talked to the Marines about killing discreetly and selectively. I use the bow hunter mentality. You have to avoid complacency, you need patience, persistence and presence at all times. I don't know if I've got that spelled right, but, that's the right word. It's a shallow man who spells a word one way, you know that right?

But, being patient, persistent, and being present, and present in their environment; that's a bow hunter's mentality. If you talk about deer hunting, killing a deer with a gun from a

- **Continue to engage the Enemy**
  - Pursue locally and where we are not
    - Border interdiction
    - River interdiction
    - Snap Vehicle Check Points
    - Time sensitive Targeting
    - Targeted Raids
  - Stay focused / Kill discretely and selectively
  - Avoid Complacency
  - Patience, Persistence and Presence
  - Bow Hunters Mindset

**Figure A-24. Focus of Effort #6**

deer stand, well anybody can do that. Killing a deer with a bow is the ultimate kill. I don't care if it's a button head, I'll be putting that rascal up on the wall if I ever kill one while stalking. That's the ultimate kill in deer hunting, it's the hardest kill. You've got to be up close and personal. You've got to be patient, which I don't have much of. You've got to be persistent, and you've got to be present in his environment and be able to operate in his environment.

And to kill discreetly and selectively and without killing the wrong people, to kill the bad guy and not the 99% of Iraqis in this case, good people, you had to have this. You had to have the bow hunter's mindset; the stalking bow hunter's mindset. When you talk to Marines about this, they understand it. With the city boy, you say it's kind of like robbing a candy store; you slip through the back window when the store's closed, underneath the beam of light, you steal the candy and you get back out without getting caught. That's the same mentality I would imagine for a city boy. So they get that too. You explain it to both your rednecks and your city boys; being patient and persistent and present in their environment. Very important!

Other agencies [see Figure A-25]. We talked a little bit about SOF, not only SOF, we had an A Team, an ODA who worked with the Albu Mahal tribe that stood up the Desert Protectors, which became a RECON Unit 4-1-1, that's how we justified it. It went as high as GEN Casey's involvement in authorizing and setting up the Desert Protectors. What they did was, they went in and they took

- Coalition Support Teams (CST)
  - Army SF
- Task Force Units (SOF)
- HUMINT Exploitation Teams (HET)
  - Marines
- Tactical Psyops Teams (TPT)
- Other Government Agencies (OGA)

**Figure A-25. Other Agencies**

out Al Qaeda, very selectively and very discreetly, in the early stages of us moving into Al Qaim. I mean, we had the Army PSYOPS teams, some great soldiers with us there, we had an Army MP platoon with us, the OGAs [other government agencies] were out there, they were doing some things and they were working with the Special Operations Forces. I need to change that to Special Operation Force. We had the SF, Special Forces, but then we also had the top tier guys. [51:40]

All of those, even the HET and the PSYOPS had different chains of command really, so to be able to use them, and operate them, and have them part of your team, we did a few things. First, there was no such thing as the word “attachment” in 3/6. You were supporting. We didn’t call them attachments, we took that stigma away. They were part of the team. We called them “independent units.” So, you now had Kilo, Lima, India and Weapons sitting around, LAR, H&S [Headquarters and Service], AAVs, and then I had my independent units that had a seat at the table, just like a company commander. I learned that as a young lieutenant when I was in 2/4, as a LAV platoon commander. I was an LAV DET commander and Col Connery treated me like a company commander as an attachment.

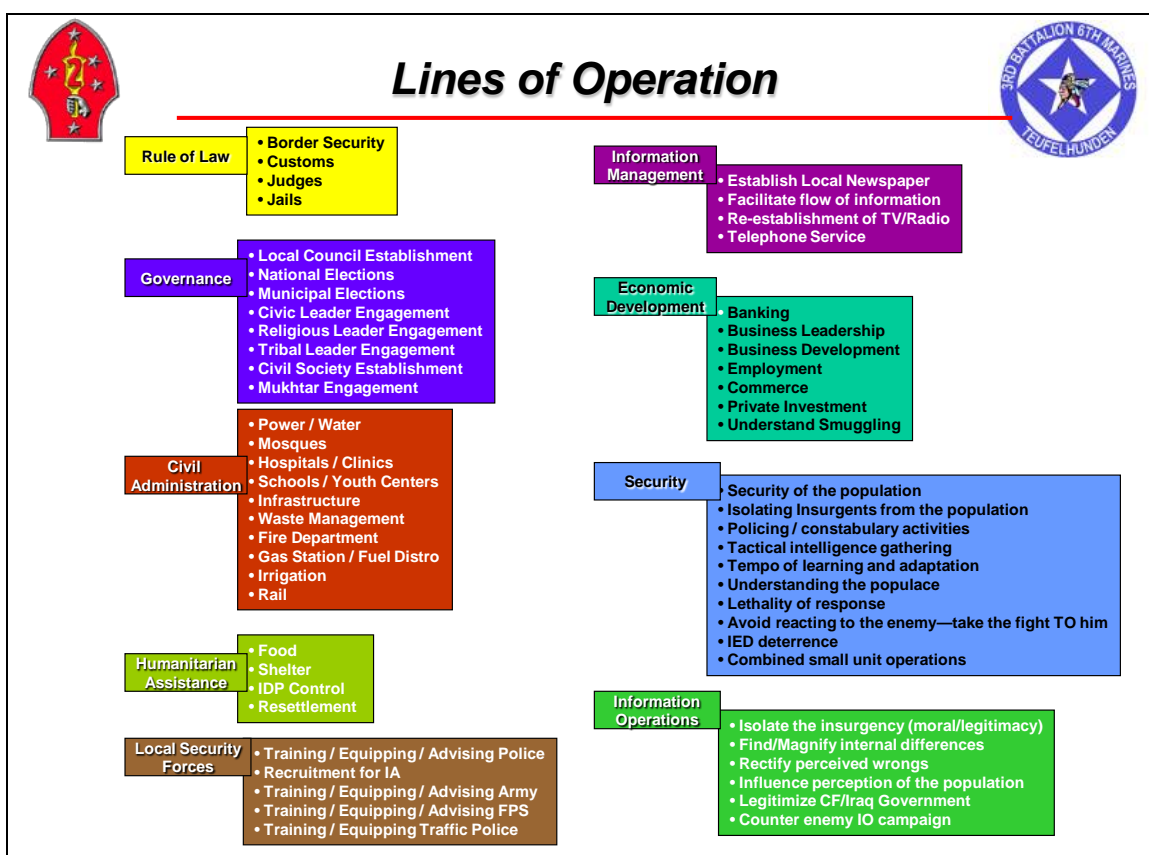


Figure A-26. Lines of Operation

So, all those lessons are a huge piece, of building a team, and these are just some of them that we used. But your EOD [Explosive Ordnance Detachment], your engineers, your tanks, you know, all those come to you as independent, and you don’t want to treat them

like attachments as if they are not part of the team. You want them wearing a 3/6 sticker when they leave, and that's important in fighting this type of war. [53:15]

We came up with our lines of operations [LOO] [Figure A-26], I won't go through them, but we had a weekly meeting, and we'd go through each one. We were coming up with LOO's back then and this is Ed Rueda coming up with this, not me. Hell, I didn't even know what a LOO was when I went to Afghanistan, I mean, we were starting to use that in Afghanistan a little bit in '04, lines of operation, now it's pretty common place. But we weren't using those terms, and in '05, and we were coming up with our own. Where should really get LOOs from? From above [higher headquarters]. In '05 we weren't getting lines of operation much from above; we were coming up with our own. Lessons Learned [Figure A-27].

You've got to make advisors part of the team; they've got to be yours. I believe what we're trying to do now and in Afghanistan, I hope we do it, is you put together advisor, ETTs (embedded training teams), PMTs (police mentoring teams), border police. They go through the six-month work up, they belong to the battalion commander, and when he de-

- Advisors have to be the FOE (MiTT/PTT)
- Train Iraqi Army for irregular fight
- COIN mind set - Armed social work
- Every patrol has a mission. i.e. census
- Kill discretely and selectively
- Lighten Infantry, Harden Logistics
- Company Intel Cells / Local Intel
- Hand-Con with supporting agencies

**Figure A-27. Lessons Learned**

ploys, they work for him. Because, you know the kind of area you are going into, and you know how many training teams you're going to need with the units, both with the army, police, and the border police. Well, we tried to do that with our advisors, those who didn't work for us were outside of our chain of command, but then we kind of make them part of our unit. But that needs to be a formal relationship. It needs to happen before you show up in country. That was one of the recommendations we talked to Gen McCrystal about when we were over there back in October or November, for Afghanistan.

We still—and this is one of the biggest mistakes—train the Iraqi Army and the Afghan Army in our own image: as a conventional force, not a counterinsurgency force. We didn't

organize, train, and equip them to fight an insurgent force. Why? Because we're not a counterinsurgent force. But, to train the indigenous force for the irregular fight is huge.

Every patrol has a mission, you know the COIN mindset, every patrol had a mission. You did not do presence patrols. When Marines do presence patrols, they'll walk out and they'll kick rocks because they have no focus. That's why ASCOPE is so good. You can take one of the six letters of ASCOPE and always put a patrol to it. Okay, you know, S, Structures, you're going to go into this sector and you're going to document every structure in that sector, every structure on that street, and how it can be used by the enemy, how it can be used by us, and how it can be used by the people. You do ASCOPE through three lenses: the enemy, yourself, and the population. [56:23]

Census is another way. As a basic census patrol, you go into this area, you're going to knock on every door, and you're going to try to find out who lives in each one of those houses, how many kids they have, what occupation they have. That gives Marines a focus and something to do. And you begin to build a picture of your area. Never, ever allow Marines to do a presence patrol.

Kill discreetly and selectively, we talked about. Lighten your infantry; we took away the vehicles. I've seen 1/5 do that in Nawa, and when my logistics went out from Al Qaim, it had tanks, it had seven ton armored trucks, and I just dared anybody to mess with them. They had teeth when the logistics train rolled. The infantry, total foot mobile, amongst the people. We came up with this concept, I didn't think of it, NCOs thought of this too, take one HMMWV and you would satellite patrol around it. So, one HMMWV would go do the middle of the street and you'd have squads that would be on two or three streets around it.

And what did that one HMMWV give us, at the tactical level? Three or four things. One, it gave us an up-gun system, it gave us a machine-gun, an automatic weapon. Once we were in the city, no Mk-19s or .50 cal and we just put a 240 Golf up there, a smaller machine gun. Why? There's less damage. It won't go through as many houses and kill kids on the other side. So it gives you an up-gun system. Two, it gives you a radio, a more powerful radio. Three, it gives you a platform to do a quick MEDEVAC with, to get people out of there. Four, it gives you the bubble. It gives you the ECM bubble around the vehicle. Those four things with one vehicle, but more than one vehicle becomes a detriment to the people and their everyday lives. You know, you're getting them turned



around and that type of thing. But one vehicle with a squad of Marines and a squad of Iraqi soldiers became the model. [58:20]

Lighten your infantry. We talk about it all the time; we do a very poor job of actually doing it. When I talk about lighten your Infantry, I'm talking about vehicles: going from a line-infantry unit to a light-infantry unit because right now we're all organized as a line-infantry unit. There's a great article in the *Gazette* a couple of months ago about the difference between line infantry and light infantry. Light infantry eats off the land, gets the water out of a creek—they live hard. Line infantry needs huge logistics and a lot of vehicles. That's the way we're organized, our Army and even the Marine Corps.

The individual Marine—I'm telling you until we figure out another way to make bullets out of something besides lead—you're gear is heavy, because bullets are heavy because they are made out of lead. You carry a lot of bullets when you're in this kind of fight. When I say bullets, I'm talking about everything, rockets, hand grenades, C-4, all the stuff that you carry as an infantryman. That's why you need to do squats, dead lifts, and cleans, and you've got to be tough.

Company Intel cells. We started doing this before it was cool. I mean 3/6 and a few other battalions were taking it out a hide, but we had to because we were so split up. It was one of those things that was, you know, best invention is through necessity, is what they say, right? We figured it out because we needed it. And then started the after actions and got it rolling in '06 and '07, and now, in the Marine Corps, it's standard and we're trying to organize our TO [task organization] of our company where we have company Intel cells.

The last item is Hand-Con. We talked about making them part of the team when they don't work for you. As an example, how do you get that guy to start calling you boss? Because when he starts calling you boss you've nailed it, you've won, and you've got good Hand-Con.

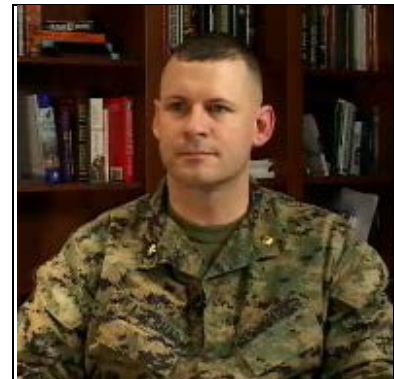
Questions?



6 July 2010

Subject: Interview with Major Brendan Heatherman, former Commander, Kilo Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines

Major Brendan Heatherman commanded Kilo Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines (3/6 Marines) from September 2005 to March 2006. 3/6 Marines operated in the Al Qaim area and was responsible for the area from the Syrian border to Ubaydi. Immediately, 3/6 Marines launched Operation IRON FIST and moved into the towns of Sadah and Karabilah to the east of the Emerald Wadi. Those areas had been taken before by other units, but this time 3/6 intended to stay. Kilo Company established Iwo Jima and then Chosin Battle Positions within that area and started conducting operations among the people. They needed to determine who the enemy was, and the best way to do that was meet and talk to the people, house-to-house, every day. Additionally, Major Heatherman linked a platoon with each of the tribes in the area as advocates for those tribes; Heatherman, became the objective arbiter on various projects and funds to be used to develop the area. Although kinetics were a big part of taking back those towns, non-kinetics and engagement were then key to gaining the support of the people to rid the area of Al Qaeda.



**Major Heatherman, former commander, Kilo Company**

Major Heatherman was interviewed at Marine Corps University on 24 February 2010 by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr.

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Dr. Bill Knarr: Please provide your name, your current duty assignment, and then your assignments with 3/6 Marines.

Major Brendan Heatherman: My name is Brendan Heatherman. I am currently a student at Command and Staff College here at Quantico. With 3/6 in Afghanistan, I was the S3-Alpha deployed to Afghanistan. I served there as the 3-Alpha with Rich Pitchford. I focused more on information operations and humanitarian operations, so I really did not serve as a traditional 3-Alpha.

I was a provisional company commander for two months at the Sarobi Dam. I did all kinds of different things while I was there. All of that stuff definitely helped me when I got to Iraq.

Knarr: That is interesting. You said you were not like a traditional S3-Alpha; sounds like you were redefining the role of an S-3-Alpha?

Colonel Dale Alford: When you don't have enough people, you use them for everything. Hell, I made him a provisional company commander for a while.

Heatherman: They sent me to a one-week information operations course. How do you learn it in a week? You think you know a lot more than what you really do, and it ends up being much harder to do it on the ground than it seems during that one week class. [2:06]

Following Afghanistan, we came back, and I took over Kilo Company from Chris O'Connell. He was the Kilo Company commander before me. [2:25]

We were lucky. It was a great company. We ended up getting our new crop of lieutenants, and I was lucky to get three very strong rifle platoon commanders who were open to expanding on what they learned at the Basic School, which was: attack, take the hill, and things like that. They were also open to trying to figure out the problem we were going to face in Iraq throughout the full spectrum [of conflict]. I think the whole battalion down to the company knew that we were going to be doing everything from traditional or conventional type operations down to small war, counterinsurgency types of things. [3:14]

We prepared ourselves for that by doing a lot of reading. We actually studied a lot on Combined Action Platoons in Vietnam...read some counterinsurgency things. It is all out there on the Web. I use to Google it, and I would find it. I remember bringing things into Colonel Alford's office, and he would say, "Yeah, I already got that stuff." But, [we prepared] by really looking into those types of things, and sharing it not only with the lieutenants, but the lieutenants sharing it with me. The bottom line is we really did not know exactly what we were going to face once we got there. We just figured it would be some sort of mix between conventional and irregular-type warfare, which it turned out to be.

At the battalion level, we got around the table with Colonel Alford to talk about what we wanted do there, which was, go in there to set up battle positions. I mean, Colonel Alford was already talking to us about this battle position concept before we even went. We knew that we were going to do that, but we did not know if we were going to be in the city or the outskirts of the city. But we knew that after we went in there that we were going to take the towns, and really start doing counterinsurgency things. So we were able to prepare ourselves.

I think we were one of the first battalions to do the RCAX [Revised Combined Arms Exercise], which was a split between the regular, traditional CAX and doing some of the counterinsurgency type of things. So we got a little taste of it there, but certainly not to the extent that they are being trained now. Our mindset was, “Hey, we have got to be ready for this other [way of fighting].” When we first got on the ground there, with adrenaline and things like that, our mind set initially to, “We are here to fight.” We had to remind ourselves to step back a little bit, which we did. When we first got there, that was the fight; it was pretty simple. We were south of the whole Al Qaim region, the enemy was in the towns. We came close to the cities, and they would fire mortars and small arms at us, which happened a lot with 3/2 before us. Even when we first got down there and started building the first battle positions south of Ubaydi, south of Sadah and Karabilah [see Figure A-28], we started looking at the battle positions over there. So, that was the situation when we first got there. [6:00]

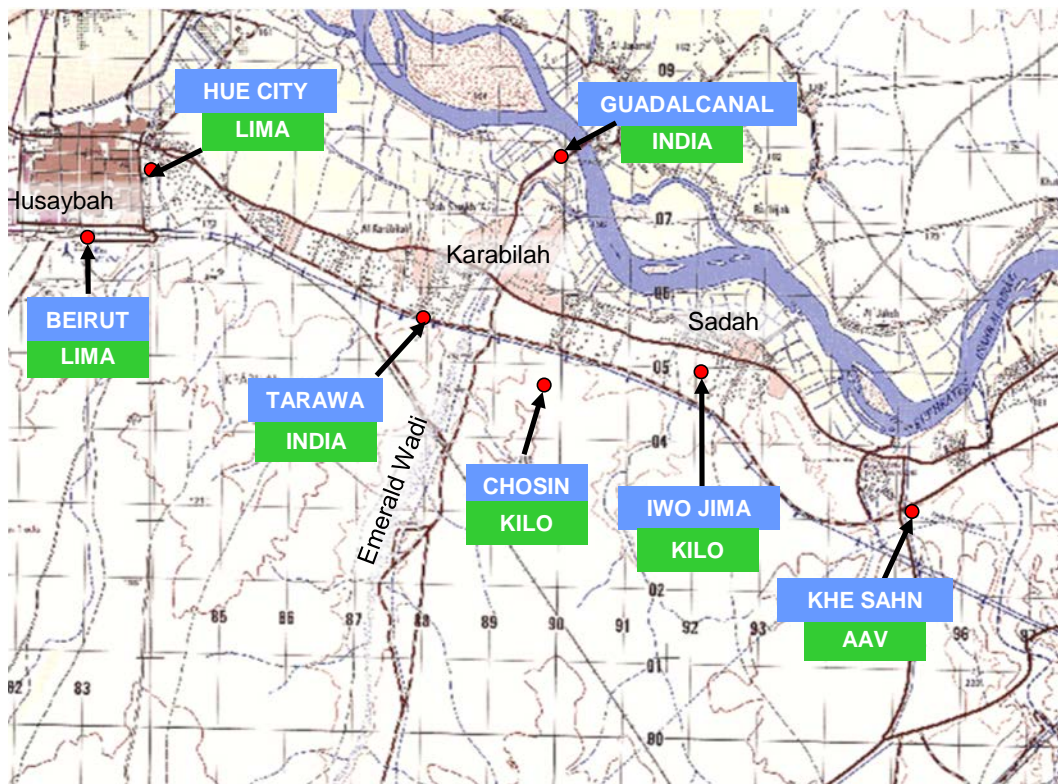


Figure A-28. Area of Operations, Kilo Company at Chosin and Iwo Jima

It was pretty black and white for us: enemy is in the city, they are shooting at us, we are south, we need to go in there conventional style. That is what we ended up doing first with

Operation IRON FIST. The key was not us going in there and clearing that town of the enemy. That had been done before; they had seen that before. We certainly had some resistance, my company alone, which probably had the least of the other two companies. IRON FIST had plenty of sniper fire starting on the second day and definitely small arms fire across the Wadi once we moved. We had a suicide vehicle hit us. We had a little bit of resistance there. When the insurgents that were in the town moved out, we moved in. They waited for us to leave, [so that they could] come back in again. But we didn't leave.

As we finished up on IRON FIST, we built battle position Iwo Jima, which was right on the west end of a small town called Sadah, and then a battle position Chosin, which was a little farther south, up on a hill right on the Emerald Wadi and the eastern part of Karabilah. Karabilah was split by the Wadi, but they still considered themselves part of Karabilah. [7:34]

We knew that the first thing we needed to do was change our mindset just a little bit. We knew we still needed to be kinetic, and we were. We were very active patrolling, gathering information, doing raids, cordons and searches, and even doing subsequent sweeps through neighborhoods in both Sadah and Karabilah.

The number one thing we needed to do, even while we were building the battle position up and making them relatively safe, was making connections with the local populace as they started filtering back into town. That was really the number one thing that we needed to do. We knew that it was only through the locals that we were going to find out who the enemy was. Actually, the first week there, it was kind of simple to find the enemy. They all wore track suits. It was amazing. Locals said, "Look for guys in track suits. They are up to something."

For the most part, they were kind of right, but that obviously went away fairly fast. We knew we really needed to make a connection with the locals to root out the insurgents. To do that, we needed to find out who the players were on the battlefield other than the locals. First and foremost was to find out who the enemy was. From our perspective, we identified four different types. The first was Al Qaeda in Iraq, former JTJ (Jama'at al-Tawid wal-Jihad). We had plenty of foreign fighters, and we knew they were coming in through Syria. We had several encounters during that first month from a few suicide bombs to even small arms fire and grenades. Things like that while on patrols and sniper fire into the battle position.

The second group was local home grown, yet still hard-line Al Qaeda. Once we really connected with the people, it was not very hard to figure out who they were, mainly because when we came in and actually stayed, they and their families did not come back. However, there was still a presence, mainly across the river. They would come back and forth across the river to hit us. When you look at Al Qaeda in Iraq from our perspective, it was the foreign and then the local home-grown in that area. [11:00]

The third were what we called “part-timers.” They were locals who for whatever reason decided to attack us and then go back to their store or farm. There were also locals who weren’t necessarily fighting us; they were just fighting anybody that came into their town. They certainly had been fighting us for several years. Kataba al Hamza is what they called themselves. There were also local, pseudo-Hamza groups who considered it their duty to oust anyone that came into their area. It was mainly the folks from Sadah that joined that. So, we had four different groups, and [knowing] that was good, because we needed to know exactly who the enemy was. [11:58]

Knarr: How did you find this out?

Heatherman: Talking to people.

Knarr: Did you have a HUMINT Exploitation Team with you?

Heatherman: No sir.

Knarr: Okay. So you had your own interpreter...

Heatherman: Yes, we just went out and began talking with people. That was really the first thing we decided to do. In fact, back up a little bit. We had a battle position in Karabilah, and we had battle position in Sadah. Out of the battle position in Sadah, we also patrolled the towns within the Drayjub area. Within that battle position—and keep in mind it took us little bit to figure all of this out—we had three different tribes. In Karabilah, we had the Albu-Karbuli Tribe. In Sadah was Albu-Mahal, and in Drayjub was the Salmani Tribe. I decided to have a platoon at battle position Chosin [12:54] who was going to represent the Karbuli Tribe. I had one of my platoons with me in battle position Iwo Jima in Sadah. They had the Albu-Mahal Tribe, which the subset was the Mahalawis that were in Sadah. Obviously, Albu-Mahal is far reaching. Then we had the Salmanis in Drayjub. These platoon commanders were responsible for that tribe. I wanted them to represent that tribe. [I told them,] “You are representing that tribe to me. I will be the honest broker. Your job is to really get in, and be a part of that tribe.”

We didn't want to look like the invaders—just the opposite. We wanted to go in there and [make] Al Qaeda and all the different insurgents in there [look like] they were the invaders, so the people would bond with us to oust the invaders. It takes five minutes to read Mao Zedong and see that is what they were really doing to us. It was pretty obvious: we get in with them, those are the bad guys, help us get rid of them. The way we did that was by trying to understand, not only culture, but it was a little more than that. We needed to understand the civil structure of the area. The civil structure is something that is really hard to comprehend. We honestly bumbled through it for a little bit. [14:26]

We tried to figure things out. So, not only do you have these towns, but these towns also have tribes, and they are part of greater tribes. So, how do they govern themselves? Who are the leaders that we need to talk to? We knew we had to figure that out even though the leaders were only half of who we wanted to meet with. We knew that the people fighting for the insurgency were your everyday workers. We literally wanted to reach down to the lowest level. Yes, we met with the leaders once a week. We did legitimate things with them and made plans with them. [15:12]

However, equally, if not more important, each one of those squads went out and got in contact with every single house. Each platoon got in contact with every single house. Each platoon has three squads and each squad had their local favorites. If you looked at it, it turned into concentric circles to where we had coverage of the whole area.

We created a very rudimentary spreadsheet because we did not have power most of the time. We did have a little lawnmower engine out there that gave us power enough to get the computer running. We woke up in the morning and all the Marines had their electronics plugged into it and the generator would go down. I wanted to know who they were, what their family name was, and what they did, so I could create a data base, which really became quite big. It became so big that I tried to keep it, and it crashed my computer. [We kept up with this information] really for intelligence purposes, but more importantly, just so we know we have everybody covered. [16:40]

I really wanted the platoon commanders to get down to that local level and become neighbors. I told them to be nosey neighbors, not just neighbors. We want to know exactly what is going on. And we want them [the locals] to tell you, because they are comfortable with you. So we patrolled meal to meal. You go out in the morning, and you have breakfast. Sometimes you bring food, and sometimes they would. You have tea, do things like that. I wanted them to do that wherever they went. It's more of a knock on the



door, take your gear off, and sit in there. You don't even need to ask him for intelligence. Don't do that. Just sit and talk to him. How did the ball game go? I didn't care as long as they were out there becoming neighborly with everybody. [17:43]

Figuring out this civil structure was very difficult. You had several different leadership types of players in the towns, starting with the mukhtar. My interpreter said that *mukhtar* means mayor. Well, we had one mukhtar in Sadah. It was very easy, although he was a little bit older. When we went to Karabilah, it was a little bit more difficult. I spoke with a guy who said he was mukhtar, but what I did not know at the time was that mukhtar could be the mukhtar of three houses or it could be the whole town. I spent two or three weeks with this guy thinking he represented the town of Karabilah, when he really didn't. But by the end of the three weeks he sure did, because we had empowered him with that area of the Karbulis in Karabilah. It was a big mistake. It caused some problems that we later overcame as we met other mukhtars and we started putting it together.

Then you've got the sheikhs and the imams. Imams dealt very little with the civil side of things. However, they were still influential because they spoke at the mosque. We did not mess too much with the imams, because they did not want to be messed with. And then the sheikh is somewhere in the middle. Albu-Mahal's sheikh was not even around. He had actually gone to Pakistan. He turned out to be the same sheikh for Albu-Mahal in the area in Husaybah and in Sadah. So they were all closely linked in there.

The Karbuli sheikh was kind of a big deal. He was kind of old. In fact, he died while we were there, and somebody else took over. Understanding the powers of play in the area was something we needed to do. We couldn't fit them into our idea of civil structure. It's not as easy as having a mayor and the town council. And they pass the city ordinances, and we all follow them, and we are happy. It was not like that. They had their own way of doing it from tribe to tribe, and we had to understand that dynamic. [20:31]

Knarr: This is fascinating.

Heatherman: This is fun stuff. Now back to the enemy a little bit. We had the four different types of enemies. So what we are doing is what I was just telling you about really getting in with the people. The easiest were the part-timers, because when you look at your enemy, you have to look beneath the enemy and say, "What is his motivation?" Some are hardliners and there is nothing you can do. [Then there are] others like the part-timers. Why is a local part-timer coming in here and throwing an RPG down range? Well, it's pretty simple: he doesn't have a job. His family is starving, his family is hungry, or he is

coerced. Why is he coerced? Well, because the insurgents own the town or at least they think they do. So, we needed to overcome that, which we did.

The foreign fighters were actually relatively easy to take care of, too. They were just as foreign as us, and they were doing damage to the town; we weren't. We were trying to help, and through the process like I was telling you earlier, we have become quite neighborly with these folks. Just like Mao rallied the Chinese to oust the Japanese in World War II. Guess who the invader was now? It was those foreign fighter Al Qaeda guys. It wasn't very difficult to do.

The other one [enemy] was the Kataba al-Hamza. Before we had gotten there, the Kataba al-Hamza had had a huge fight with Al Qaeda. Now bear in mind, they are no fans of ours either. They got ousted to Akashat and a lot of their families were in Sadah and Albu-Mahal. We had ousted Al Qaeda for them. Now they were going to come back and get rid of us. It was no longer a two-front war for them. There was only one and that was us. We needed to understand the dynamic, which we did fast. Then we reached out to these guys and said, "Look, we are not the invaders. The invaders are gone. We are not here for long. We have done damage to the towns, and we are going to help you fix it." And we actually did it. It turned out that by January/February we had gotten a lot of those Hamza guys to join the Iraqi Army—"There you go, you've got jobs."

And then you've got your hard line Al Qaeda, which we just had to go in and kill. Which we did, and that was that. Once we moved in and made some of these connections with the people, they could not get back in. They had nowhere to hide. They had no support, so they went elsewhere, bottom line. They could not get back into Sadah, Karabilah, or even Drayjub anymore. In Drayjub, the Salmanis were not much of a player. Now, we started coming up with new challenges. Back up a little bit to the Kataba al-Hamza. As the Americans moved out to Al Qaim, and Al Qaeda moved in, and they [the Americans and Al Qaeda] were fighting a war in their town, we've got town folks rise up to get rid of the fighting in their town, and Hamza was born.

Knarr: Hamza was born?

Heatherman: Yes, Kataba al-Hamza; that is what they call themselves. It might have been part of a greater group.

It turned out that we had a lot of problems between my two platoon commanders who were both representing different tribes.

Knarr: Did the different tribes get along?

Heatherman: Oh, they did not get along. We did not figure this out until the parliamentary elections. The Albu-Mahals went and voted, and the Karbulis did not. Why didn't the Karbulis vote? They did not support the insurgency. [They said] The voting site was on Albu-Mahal land. [I said] Ok. But you all live next to each other here. What is the problem? Simple. We had bad guys, meaning Americans and Al Qaeda, come into the town; one group, Albu-Mahal, stood up and tried to fight you all [Americans]. The Karbulis caved into whomever, and that really bugged the Mahalawis [Albu-Mahal]. They were butting heads, so we really needed to work from there to have the two tribes get along. So, we had all of this chaos inside the area of operations. Some of it had to do with the enemy, and some of it had to do with civil things. Some of it had to do with inter tribal things. It was just one big dynamic that we needed to figure out or let play its course. Sometimes it was just not our business. [25:53]

Knarr: Did you have a company-level intelligence cell?

Heatherman: No, but we did have a lance corporal, that came down from S2.

Alford: You built your own cell?

Heatherman: We built our own, surrounded by me.

Alford: You were the first one to do it.

Heatherman: Right.

Knarr: Well, that is what I mean. Regardless of whoever mans it, you had developed this excel spreadsheet, and you were doing the link analysis? [26:23]

Heatherman: Most of it was in our heads and not just mine.

Knarr: Did you have a couple people doing that?

Heatherman: No, it was at the platoon level. It was almost at every level. They had their own bank of knowledge about the area.

Alford: Who was doing your database for you?

Heatherman: I was.

Alford: You had that other kid that sat there in that COC [Company Operations Center] all the time. Was he your intelligence guy? [26:43]

Heatherman: No Sir, that was my radio operator, sir. I might occasionally have him type things in.

Knarr: And you said you had a corporal come down from the S2 shop?

Heatherman: We had a lance corporal that was there, but he mainly kind of figured out if we needed some maps and some things like that. He was way over his head to figure that out, because he came in half way. It would take long enough just to fill him in. But he did a great job with what he had. And you know we could use an extra guy. I would put him in my vehicle as a rifleman. [27:22]

Knarr: Now at the platoon level, was it just the platoon leaders that figured this out? Or was it...

Heatherman: Oh no, this really caught on down to the lowest level. They really figured out the importance of connecting with the local populace. It kept them safe, and it made them win. And they liked it.

Knarr: I'm going to tell you where I am going with this. This is interesting. People make structures to do things, because they see a gap in operations, so they develop a company-level intelligence cell or whatever. But you had this permeated so well at the individual level that you really didn't feel you needed a company-level intel cell or a platoon intel cell or a squad intel cell, because everyone understood?

Heatherman: Everyone knew what was going on. And, I wouldn't have known this back then, but it was like a reality show. Everybody would come in and say, "You are not going to believe this..." or "I saw so and so's wife go over there and...". They really got into the nitty gritty of this town. I put things on a database, and I spent most of my time out doing things, and so the database was pretty rudimentary. We ended up putting a good product in for turnover, but a lot of the good stuff from the town was in my head, the platoon commander's heads, Newton's head, Fishheasher's head, the squad leaders' head. There was so much [information] that it was invaluable. I stayed an extra week during the turnover, trying to unload this for the 1/7 guys, because there was so much. I know from talking with my platoon commanders that it took them months to unplug, because your mind is racing to what is going on as you are filling it with the difference dynamics of the area. [29:15]

Knarr: Let me ask you another questions. You know the targeting process, some people use it for non-kinetics and as well as for kinetics. Did you use any conventional tools for a

non-conventional type of process? Non-kinetics could be engagement, influence, or et-cetera. Did you think in those terms?

Heatherman: A little bit. I guess I am not the absolute most organized guy in the world.

Knarr: Sounds like it worked. [30:12]

Heatherman: We had a few things out there. In fact, I was telling the story earlier about a fire fight between some insurgents with our base, and I had kept several lists on the board. Some of the lists were general high value target lists that we got down from regiment. But we had what we called the usual suspects list. We knew some people in town were bad, but we did not have anything on them. And by the way, when we caught people, we put together a case on them. So, we caught them, and then went out and did interviews. We collected evidence—we did the whole gamut. [30:32]

There was this one guy who was in his early 20s. It was he and his brother. He was up to no good. I knew it because the town did not trust him. I had to tell the town there was nothing we could do. If we ever got attacked, we immediately punched out patrols to the usual suspects' houses. And lo and behold, he came walking up with a mask on and an AK47 right after a shooting. It was crazy. We just caught him. So we did have some things like that. It gets into the "connect with people" piece. And the other piece that you were getting into is when you start talking about targeting.

We had targets in the area who we tracked, interviewed, and really put together information on. Then we acted on it when we felt it was right. We did that, and we did have a bit of an information campaign going on. We had some flyers and some things that we put out, and we did not even know what they said. When we are talking about information, we kind of let our actions do it.

Now we did have a suicide bomber hit us. We put out a leaflet after saying, *Do you want to be a suicide bomber? Look at what you are going to end up being.* In fact I think Chris O'Connor wrote that for us. It said something like, *You want to be a suicide bomber...you are going to be eaten by dogs*, or something like that. We passed that out; I kept a copy of it. It was a good one. I couldn't have written it better myself.

Knarr: You have a copy of it?

Heatherman: Oh sure, I got that somewhere. It's all in Arabic. So, you connect with the locals to open up information. We were collecting information not only on bad guys, but on what we were talking about earlier. The whole structure, religiously and culturally, in the

area, so we could really blend in and be nosey neighbors. We did have an information operations campaign. We did things like we would do raids sometimes just so neighbors would know that we were on it. We said that we would come and get your neighbor if he is a problem. We [let them know that] we were out there...there is no need to worry because we are out in the town. [33:10]

All the patrols we sent out always had a mission, and that is pretty standard. The mission was you are not just going to get out and walk the streets. You're going to get out of the vehicles and you're going to go from house to house. That alone sent the message of security. We also had to show strength. If there was some sort of problem, we would go in on a hard raid. Everybody understood, we are not going to destroy anything, but they needed to see that we had power and we can strike. And sometimes we had actionable—I am not going to call it intelligence that did not come out of our COC —actionable information is what I will call it. Sometimes we got people and sometimes we didn't. Regardless, we were out there. We had informants in town, and if they were giving us stuff and nothing was happening, they would start clamming up. So we really needed to let them know that we were neighborly, and we were going to take care of the area and provide security.

Knarr: So you responded to their reports to let them know that you cared?

Heatherman: Most of the time. We needed to let them know. We told them that we needed to corroborate this with other people. Most of the time, it was pretty good. Sometimes we swung and missed, but we ended up getting a lot of weapon caches. We got some things out of that, but that really was not our main mission. If we found a weapons cache then that was good, but we were really focused on the people. The people will tell you where the caches are. It was really that simple. [34:55]

As we rolled on, we kind of got all this in place. We had locals (this is before Operation STEEL CURTAIN) that would come up with whole battle plans for us to do. We ended up calling it STEEL CURTAIN, and it was kind of funny. They were like, "Okay, this is what you need to do: come up from the south..." So they knew that we needed to go over the Wadi. Prior to STEEL CURTAIN, every time we went up to the river, we'd get into a fire fight across the river. Anytime on the Wadi, we had snipers on the Wadi and a couple of tanks. We had part of a platoon constantly on the Wadi everyday exchanging gunfire.

These people could not wait for us to do STEEL CURTAIN, even though as Albu-Mahals, it was just the Karbuli across the Wadi. Number one, having the Karbulis there caused them distress. Number two, the major market in the area is in Husaybah. If Husaybah

and Karabilah have insurgents then they could not drive there and begin work. Until the place was safe, children couldn't go back to school and they couldn't get their businesses up and running. So even though we were focused on connecting with the people, giving them impression of safety, and working that information campaign, there was still really conventional work to do. We went in and did that. [36:33]

When we finished STEEL CURTAIN, as far as the enemy was concerned, things just got increasingly better, and the people were really happy. Then we could begin working on civil projects. When you talked about pumping money into the area, it's more than just "build a school and provide school supplies," which is what we absolutely did. We wanted to really become part of their local economy, so we used local contractors to make improvements on Iwo Jima. We bought gravel from them. [37:13]

On top of that, Marines had their wives and moms send them money, and we ate off the locals. I can't think of one person that didn't eat at least one meal a day from out of town. We had stacks of MREs [meals-ready-to-eat] that had dust on them. Actually, the Iraqi soldiers would go in there and pick them apart and eat them, but the Marines wouldn't. I know my wife sent me pots and pans, and I cooked on the stove. Everybody had their thing going. We lived with the locals, and we ate with the locals. We used our own money to do that, and that was just part of being neighborly. It ended up working real well. It wasn't until we came to command and staff that we started looking at connecting with the people, the information part and the economic part. That's the whole of government approach, and we just stumbled onto it. Now we've got something to call it, but we did not know that back then. We sort of figured that out and did it. Practicing the different elements—from diplomacy to integrating economically—I can't say it completely won them over. We were still foreign, but they knew we weren't invaders, and that we were leaving. That was good. [38:37]

Knarr: I am trying to visualize how I would tell that story. That's a good story.

Heatherman: And that was not even the fun stuff. The fun stuff was we still got into some fire fights. We had some pretty scary things happen. But that was not the important part of being there. Some of the shootings and some of the kinetics stuff was really necessary. It was really the supporting effort for getting what we needed. I thought of an interesting story concerning the first parliamentary election. When we start thinking about how we were going to let them vote and what a great thing that was. This was in October or November 2005. It was after the big suicide bomb that hit us.

Alford: Sadah was the only one that did it [voted], because the rest of the place was still bad because we hadn't taken it yet.

Heatherman: Right. The Karbulis who were on the east-side of the Wadi wouldn't walk into the Albu-Mahal side, because they were still feuding over the Hamza piece. First of all, elections to them at that time were not very important. Whereas we may see that as symbolic of our freedom, [they do not see it that way.] They did not feel like it was their place to vote. I thought that was interesting; that's what the terp [interpreter] told me. So, they said, "Look, what I need you to do is to come by my house and force me to vote." I said, "You want me to bring back a ballot box to each house and force you to vote?" "Yes, at gunpoint," they said. "You want us to force you to vote by gunpoint? Are you afraid that someone may see you go vote?" They said, "No not over here we are not afraid, but we need to be told to vote, and then you need to tell us who to vote for." I thought that was really bizarre.

When it came to opening the schools, I thought we had everything set. We put all the school supplies in and I went to the mukhtar and said, "Why isn't the school open?" His response was, "You did not tell me to open it." I said, "Why aren't the shops open?" He said, "You did not tell me to open the shops." It turned out that really, especially among the old folks, it was almost like it was institutional to wait to be told. Have you ever seen that movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*? Red is let out [of prison] and, he is working in the grocery store. He asked if he could use the bathroom. You don't need to ask. He said, "After 30 years, I cannot squeeze a drop without permission."

It was weird because the older folks there needed absolute permission. They just did not want to go. Even when they thought it was safe, they still wanted somebody to tell them it was ok. I am wondering if they broke out of that or if that was the reason behind it. I could not figure that out. They really needed permission to do things. I thought that was odd. [44:25]

When it came to the elections themselves, obviously the presidential election turned out to be highly successful. We figured out to open more election sites, at least by tribe so they felt comfortable crossing some tribal boundaries. I think folks were generally happy about being able to elect the president, but I never really got that it was that big of a deal to them. Go back a couple of years to being in Khost, Afghanistan. There was absolute jubilation in the streets. You would think it would be kind of the opposite, you know, with Afghanistan being maybe a little bit more tribal, secluded, you know, when you



start talking about the Pashtuns. But there was jubilation in the streets. In Iraq, now I am not saying it did not happen in Husaybah, I don't know, but in my area, it really wasn't that much of a factor for them. It was like "Okay, but how does that affect us?" And then we start talking about their relationship between Albu-Mahal and Sadah with Mayor Farhan. I think that we created a relationship there, when there was not a need for it before. I know that because the mukhtar who everybody in Sadah knew, I introduced him to Mayor Farhan. I was shocked; I figured that they would have known each other. It was just another dynamic that I had never figured out. There is always more work to do, but at that point it was almost time to say, "It's yours now. Take it and run."

Knarr: I would like to stay in contact for a couple of reasons. First, to make sure I portray things right. We will send you a transcript of this and you can correct any of the mistakes. Whatever clips we use, we will send to you to make sure you know what we are doing.

Heatherman: It's funny because when you get home everybody wants to hear shoot-em up stuff. Really that was not the factor. Go figure. [48:11]

Knarr: I'm thinking about how I'm going to put visuals together to complement what you are saying, and I am not sure. Automatically, I think of link analysis charts and stuff like that, but yours were kind of diffused. It was kind of doing everything at once. [48:40]

Heatherman: It kind of was. We kind of grew into it. Before the whole civil piece, we were working with the people, figuring out the enemy and figuring out the area. You are right—how do you portray that? Show pictures of tribal elders, because really, you had the civil side and the tribal side. They sort of blurred together. Then you had the religion side, which was relatively uninterested in civil politics. But, still, it had some sort of affect on them. But, you didn't mess with the imams there. Don't mess with them. Leave them alone. Let them do their own thing. And we did, and we respected that, so it was good. [49:13]

Knarr: Somehow you found patterns in that chaos.

Heatherman: It took me a long time to unplug from that place. Not necessarily emotionally, but mentally. Because you are plugged into a hundred moving parts going one hundred miles an hour. When we finally moved out of there...I had lost 35 lbs. I was skinny; my wife was like, who is this wimp...eat a cheeseburger or something.



15 January 2010

Subject: Interview with Major Rich Pitchford, former Commander, Lima Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines

Major Rich Pitchford commanded Lima Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines (3/6 Marines) from September 2005 to March 2006. 3/6 Marines operated in the Al Qaim area and was responsible for the area from the Syrian border to the city of Ubaydi. Maj Pitchford's company was responsible for Husaybah's security. His company was one of the first units to establish a permanent presence throughout the city and begin to work with the local population.



Major Rich Pitchford was interviewed at Marine Corps University on 22 March 2010 by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr. Colonel Dale Alford, USMC was present.

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Major Pitchford: I'm Major Rich Pitchford. I was the Lima Company Commander, 3/6 Marines in Al Qaim from September 2005 to March 2006.

Dr. Bill Knarr: Please talk to the sequence of when you arrived, your area of operations [AO], and your mission?

Pitchford: Camp Gannon sits right on the border with Syria. It was originally the point of entry or the border crossing between Syria and Iraq, just south of the Euphrates. When we got there as Battalion 3/6, Camp Gannon was one of the outposts separate from the rest of the battalion command.

We got there late August of 2005 and started to RIP [relief in place] out with India Company 3/2. They had a pretty tough go. They had gotten some pretty severe IED [improvised explosive device] attacks. It was during their tour that the large dump truck bomb tried to run their perimeter, so they had a challenging tour. They had built a very in-depth urban defense, and they had gotten a foothold in the city. The point of entry at Camp Gannon straddles right there on the border, and they had branched out a few hundred meters. They had a foothold in the city of Husaybah, and had a compound there. For all purposes it was defensive. They weren't really doing a whole lot outside of there, because it was not a permissive environment even to patrol. They were doing everything they could, and they had made some contacts. At the time of our RIP, the Albu-Mahal

Tribe was under a lot of pressure and was getting forced out of the city. They [3/2] were doing what they could to help the Albu-Mahals. It was really an interesting situation to be put in. We did everything we could to learn from what they [3/2] were doing and then look at how we could take the next step forward. It was a tough go in those early days.

Personally, I think from the company commander's stand point, we wanted to make sure the locals knew that there was a new unit there. We wanted them to understand that we were not going to sit back and take things. We were very active in our defense, and we did everything we could to keep the enemy off balance. We had a lot of success right off the bat with our snipers. In fact, before India 3/2 left, we did a joint operation. Their snipers and our snipers went out and surveyed a train station south of the city that we knew or suspected to be an insurgent stronghold. Later on in the day they got identification on the movements they needed and called in air strikes on that train station, which later became one of our battle positions, ironically.

Knarr: Sequence of events? You had a couple of major operations. I think LET IT ROLL was one of the things you did first.

Pitchford: The first major operation for us, beyond things that we just did at the company level was IRON FIST. Part of our company came out of Camp Gannon and our positions around the border and participated in the operation which cleared Sadah. That was the first of the larger operations for us. It was kind of an indication of things to come. That was a battalion-size operation that was able to clear Sadah with basically our own companies on line. If you recall, once Sadah was cleared, the battalion was able to establish more battle positions throughout the Al Qaim area. I look at that as phase one with STEEL CURTAIN being phase two.

I would say STEEL CURTAIN had the largest impact on Lima Company. It cleared Husaybah and allowed us to start getting out and working with the population. We went from basically three platoons in a fairly static defensive position around that border check point to spreading out into the city. We had two more battle positions and other positions to look after.

Knarr: Talk about the Albu-Mahal tribe.

Pitchford: When we got to Husaybah, from what I understood, the Albu-Mahal tribe had started to push back against Al Qaeda elements. They were tired of their [Al Qaeda's] presence in Al Qaim; they, the Albu Mahals, were starting to get forced out of Husaybah. From what I understand, the leaders of the tribe had to flee. They fought for a while and tried to rise up

against Al Qaeda, but they did not have the strength to do it completely. There were also indications that other tribes were not following their lead. They were working not only against Al Qaeda but the other tribes, and they were getting pushed out of the city.

They fell back or withdrew to Akashat and kind of rallied up there. From my understanding, although I was not directly involved, it was in Akashat where the Special Forces elements made contact with them, and started the foundation of what would become the Desert Protectors. This was the force that we partnered with initially during IRON FIST.

It was a tricky situation with the Albu-Mahals after Husaybah was cleared. The Albu-Mahals had an obvious bias against the other tribes in Husaybah. Beyond the Albu-Mahals, the other dominant tribe was the Salmanis. There was a lot of friction and head butting between those two tribes. We did not want things to just devolve into a tribe-on-tribe fight. It was very tricky convincing the Dessert Protectors and the Albu-Mahals not to take revenge on the Salmanis and the other tribes that either stood by or helped as they were forced out of Husaybah initially.

Knarr: Did the Desert Protectors come about when you were there or had they been developed before you got there? [9:23]

Pitchford: I couldn't say when the first meeting was between the Special Forces elements and the Albu-Mahals in Akashat. My sense is that the conditions were set right as we were coming in. As I mentioned, there was a lot of pressure from Al Qaeda, and they were forcing the Albu-Mahals out of the city. In fact, a number of them were actually taking refuge at Camp Gannon when I arrived. I did not fully understand the situation, but knew that this tribe had tried to stand up and was getting run out of their city. I don't know when the first conversations took place between the Special Forces' ODA [Operational Detachment Alpha] and the Albu-Mahals. I would say the conditions were established when they were pushed out and took refuge in Akashat, and they were ready to strike back.

Knarr: I keep seeing the Hamza Battalion. Did the Hamza Battalion form from the Albu-Mahal?

Pitchford: I don't know if I can correctly answer that. The Kataba Hamza, as a combination of the tribes has its place, but I couldn't say for sure what the connections were. I probably could at the time, but I could not speak accurately to that now.

Knarr: What were some of the successes you felt you had and what were some of the things you wish you could continue to work on had you remained?

Pitchford: For us, once Husaybah was cleared, it was really a night-and-day shift. Imagine that we had been in the defense with almost no interaction with the local population. That was not what we wanted to do coming over. It was not what we trained to do, but it was the reality on the ground. It just was not a permissive environment to go patrolling in the city and work with the locals. For us, the clearing of Husaybah meant a night-and-day difference. We were immediately able to work with the locals.

Our successes were about securing the environment and population. I think we had an advantage in some respects, in that Husaybah is one of the more populated areas and one of the centers of governance for the area. Where other company commanders had to interact with all walks of life, I had a lot of help. Col Alford came down and was always there working with the mayor and local leaders. All of the important meetings initially took place in Husaybah at one of our battle positions. It really allowed me to focus on security, and I think we were able to keep a constant presence in the city. We were responsive to locals concerns, but we also had a lot of help both in higher leadership in the battalion and a civil affairs team that worked out of one of our firm bases as well. I felt fortunate in that way. In terms of success, I would say for Lima Company, it was the security of Husaybah.

What I would like to have seen had we been able to stay longer is what we were working towards. I think the establishment of a more viable local police force was on the horizon. We worked on the ground floor of that and helped recruit folks locally, but we did not see the actual implementation. We saw the return of a lot of businesses. Husaybah contains the market for most of the area. We saw that growing, and I think it would have continued to grow. It would have been interesting and we tried to get some of the media back out there. At the end of STEEL CURTAIN there were images on CNN and various networks of the destruction. We really wanted to show them what we were going to do. We started to turn the corner. There were shops opening up. The people were content and things were getting back to business. Their situation had improved, and we were working to continue to improve it. [14:31]

Knarr: Knowing that contact with the people was so important, did you have any type of company-level intel cell that you had developed? Were the HETs [HUMINT Exploitation Teams] working with you at all? You said the ODAs were.

Pitchford: We had a HET—I would not call it a company-level intel cell. I was given intel analysts that I would not normally have at the company level. The battalion pushed those

down to me, so I had assets to help work through that. We had HET and a few intel Marines, and we did what we could.

Also, early on, our only connection prior to Husaybah being cleared was one phone line which we would occasionally get tips from locals on. I'm not sure how they dialed us up, but it was really the only connection between us and the population. That was the extent of our intel apparatus. It was good to have the HET, especially once the city was cleared. They got out quite a bit. They were able to get a good feel for the population and understand who was who out there and start making some headway.

Knarr: Did you retain the same HET your entire time there? Did they rotate out? Was it in direct support of your area or was it kind of in general support?

Pitchford: I had the same HET the entire time. I think they RIP'd slightly before us. For the most part it was cohesive. They were really good in terms of working with us. They were constantly out there and did a good job.

Knarr: You talk about securing the environment and the people. Did you do census operations? Did you have any tools to be able to support that?

Pitchford: I wouldn't say we had tools or a specific program. Our platoons, who were divided up around the city, each had areas that I charged them with knowing everybody in the area. I wanted them to be able to speak to who the imams were in the area, who the tribal leaders were in the area, and know what industry drove their little section of the city. I wouldn't say we built a phonebook of Husaybah or a true census, but at the platoon/squad level, I think all the Marines understood who was who in their slice of Husaybah. I think that paid dividends. People started to understand who they were. They talked to the locals constantly, and they also recognized when someone was not right in their portion of the city.

Knarr: When you went through your RIP and the new unit came in, did you have anything to pass on to them as far as the data for the area?

Pitchford: We were able to pass quite a bit in terms of who the leaders were and who the key folks were in the city. We made introductions to all the important players and discussed different aspects of the city in terms of what tribes primarily live in this corner. We discussed what happened during our time in this piece of the city, so they had a bit of knowledge as they went forward as to what has just transpired.

Knarr: Who are the people we should see when we go over?

Pitchford: I would say Mayor Farhan. As a company commander in Husaybah, he was probably the most important person in my little AO. He was also very important to the battalion. In terms of interaction, I probably spoke to him the most or dropped by and talked to one of his deputies to see if he had any needs, etc. I alluded to the initial push back between the Albu-Mahals and the Salmanis. I found that working through him was a way not to appear to be taking sides between those two and encouraging any kind of retribution from the Albu-Mahals.

Knarr: Anybody in the Salmani tribe we should talk to?

Pitchford: I am sure there are plenty. They were good folks. I think the banker, whose name escapes me, is Salmani. He always seemed like a very good man. I don't think any of the Albu-Mahals had any problems with him. He was also a key part in getting things back up and going again. I remember he was fairly excited after STEEL CURTAIN when he was able to re-open his bank with a large cash infusion from Baghdad.

Knarr: We talked about the ODA and the Desert Protectors. Anyone in the Desert Protectors you think we ought to talk to?

Pitchford: Hopefully we can track down, I believe he is a major now, Major Joe Connolly. From what I understand he was the ODA leader at the time. The way I understand it, he is the one who went to Akashat and started the initial discussions with them. It's interesting, in my last job, I worked at JFCOM [Joint Forces Command] in the Special Ops Command. One of the contractors there is a retired Army colonel, who had been the JSOTF LNO [Joint Special Operations Task Force Liaison Officer] in Baghdad. He was there during that time, and he actually knows quite a bit about it. He has a pennant in his cubicle that says "Father of the Desert Protectors."

Knarr: Who was that?

Pitchford: The name is going to escape me, but I will certainly look that up. I will forward his name to you. When we first started down this trail, I asked him who should I talk to. COL Jerry Cummings is his name.

Knarr: Jerry Cummings

Pitchford: He led me to the folks we have been able to contact thus far. [21:10]

Knarr: That is great. I think that whole development is just absolutely incredible.



Pitchford: I think the conditions for that to happen probably started when we were arriving, from what I could tell. It would be real interesting to diagnose the missteps of AQI [Al Qaeda in Iraq], and how they managed to alienate that tribe. Whether it was things that they physically did wrong or whether they were infringing on the Albu-Mahals business practices. I am not certain, but I think it really set the conditions for us to move things forward once Husaybah was cleared. That was definitely when all the pieces were there for a very successful time.

Knarr: You were certainly in one of the hardest areas in Iraq. You have done a great job. What did I miss? As you look back on your time there, what sticks out? What were some of the theme's that we didn't discuss?

Pitchford: Well, I don't know if anything has really been missed. It has occurred to me now that we are starting to see a different approach in Afghanistan. I just got a brief the other day from a battalion commander talking about how he spread his battalion out into twenty-some different little FOBs [Forward Operating Bases]. To me, that was happening in 2005 and 2006 in Al Qaim. It's good that technique is getting out there, and I am sure Col Alford has been making sure folks have been capturing the lessons of Al Qaim. I think other folks were doing it at the same time. We happened to have the right conditions and the right reinforcements to get it done while we were there.

Knarr: Yeah, that's neat. I appreciate that. In fact, I can look up Jerry Cummings in the AKO. Great work. Thank you.

Pitchford: Jerry, I think he wants to push back on his moniker as "Father of the Desert Protectors," because he realized that it was some ODA Captain. But he definitely had a role.

Knarr: Yeah and I am sure he has a story.

Col Alford: Colonel Davis, Chris Starling and Jerry Girard, they are the ones that started it in Akashat. They decided to bring in the ODA to manage it..

Knarr: Okay.

Pitchford: That's important. Whose idea was it?

Alford: And then General Casey supported it, so then people in his staff supported it, and that's when the Colonel [Davis] came in. [25:03]

Pitchford: I think that was COL Cummings. He was the JSOTF LNO to Casey's staff, so he pushed it from his end and said this was a good idea.

Knarr: Talk about this bulldozer.

Pitchford: When we arrived in late August of '05, we had a D9 bulldozer at the firm base at Camp Gannon that was not working. Col Alford came out to visit, and he took a look at our firm base and our company defense. He made a lot of recommendations in terms of what we needed to get rid of and what the enemy could use to close with our position and take shots at us. It all made a lot of sense. We had enough demolitions to do a good bit of it, but we really needed this bulldozer for that and for other follow on operations. You can imagine that having a giant bulldozer is a good thing to have when berming up a new FOB or when constructing anything. The bulldozer was not working, so it took quite a lot to get it running. We had a lot of parts flown in from various places, and finally we had it up and running. We had already blown-up everything we could, things that needed to be removed from the urban area between Camp Gannon and the rest of the city.

Really, the whole goal was to try to reduce the amount of Marines it took to hold the positions. We really had the entire company involved in defending itself. Any way that you can make it more efficient—minimize the number of posts you had without interfering with your own security—meant that more Marines could be used elsewhere. Obviously, Col Alford recognized that and his goal was to get as efficient as possible, so he could pull Marines out for other areas. And then later, his vision was to spread us throughout the populated area. So getting the defense more efficient, clearing the rubble, and making Gannon a more manageable firm base was important. Getting this bulldozer up took monumental efforts. We blew-up with constant demolitions all these old remnants of this blown-up port of entry. Imagine this is where the truck bomb had gone off in April against India 3/2. The whole area was pretty scarred anyway, but there was a lot of rubble and things the enemy could use against us.

There was a large billboard made of concrete, steel, and marble [at the border]. It was probably from the days when the border was open. It was the face of Saddam that you would initially see coming from Syria as you entered Iraq. It was a giant mark of Saddam's regime with his face depicted on it. It was a well-built giant billboard. We had done our best to drop this monstrosity, because it offered a place for folks to sit behind and shoot RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] at us. We had blown it with a lot of C4, and it was still standing. When we got the dozer running, the Marine running it cleared most of the rubble out and then he went after that billboard. Imagine sitting up high, and he runs at it the first time and nothing happens. The weapons company commander, Clinton Culp, happened to be visiting, and he and I were watching this happen. We went running

towards it, because we knew if he took another run at it, it was going to fall right on top of him. Before we could get there, it fell on top of the armored bulldozer. Thankfully, the Marine was not hurt, but that thing was out of action for another several weeks.

While it's kind of a fun story, bulldozers were critical to everything that the battalion wanted to accomplish, and it was an asset that I had mismanaged. Fortunately, I think the CBs [Construction Battalion, also known as Seabees] came through later on for us. Col Alford had reserve CBs driving bulldozers through the southern desert south of Al Qaim. They only moved about five kilometers an hour. He had them moving through the desert just slow as can be with a tank escort just to get them in place to help build the platoon and company positions he wanted to build after IRON FIST. So, that's the D9 story. It's a great piece of gear if you can keep it up and running. Sometimes Marines need a lesson in physics on what will happen.

Alford: This thing was left by 3d ACR [Armored Cav Regiment]. There were three Marine battalions that rotated through that base and nobody had ever fixed it. I saw that SOB and I said "we are going to fix that." It belonged to the Army and they never came back to get it. It's been there for two years. Nobody had it on any accounts or anything. I never gave it back either.

Pitchford: Obviously the D9 bulldozers were crucial to what we did there. One of the things I failed to mention earlier was the amount of assets that, as a company commander, Col Alford pushed to us that we normally didn't have, especially at Camp Gannon and Lima Company. We had a bit of our own little empire out there. As I mentioned earlier, we had a HET. We also had bulk fuelers, because we had a tiny strip where you could land a helicopter and re-fuel your vehicles. We had a ROWPU [Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Unit]. Once we established more security, Col Alford pushed us an Army laundry unit. We really had a lot of additional assets. I would say one of my lessons that I would pass on to other company commanders would be, be prepared to figure out how you're going to manage all these assets. I was fortunate in that not only were we are given all these things, but I had a really talented company staff, the XO, the company Gunny, and the First Sergeant. They really were able to manage all those extra things that you wouldn't normally have.

It was quite interesting, we had worked to get a well drilled. I think it was in the works before we were coming in, but somebody said, "Hey we need to drill a well at Camp Gannon, so they can be more self sufficient." Of course later on we wanted to be out in the city

more, but they drilled this well and the water was so hard that we had to run it through a ROWPU to get it to where you could drink it. Then after Husaybah was cleared, we would just drive up to the Euphrates, fill gallons of water, run it through the ROWPU, and then have all the water we would ever need. That is one of the things I would pass on to other company commanders. Just have a plan for how you are going to manage all the extra assets and really know what's out there to help you accomplish your mission.

18 August 2011

Subject: Interview with Captain Jim Calvert, USA, Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha Commander, Al Qaim

Captain Calvert,<sup>1</sup> USA, commanded the Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha in Al Qaim from September 2005 to January 2006. Captain Calvert helped organize and advise the first Desert Protectors teams in Al Qaim during Operation STEEL CURTAIN in November 2005. It was the first time that a tribe, the Albu-Mahals, provided recruits to be inducted into the Iraqi Security Forces and to be used in combating Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Captain Calvert was interviewed at the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) on 26 November 2010 by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr and Ms. Mary Hawkins, both of IDA. The following is his account of the development and use of the Desert Protectors.

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Dr. Bill Knarr: Please provide your background.

Captain Calvert: I came from a military family. I had a SF [Special Forces] NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] for a father. I went to West Point and graduated with an International Relations degree and took Arabic while I was there. I was an Infantry Platoon leader in the 82<sup>nd</sup>. In 2002, I went through the selection process to be a SF Officer and was selected. I went through the Q[ualification] course and finished in 2004. I went straight to a team in 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group at Fort Campbell, and I took over a team as soon as I got to the group. They were already deployed, so I deployed immediately. I had actually just gotten married, and I introduced my wife to the Army. The household goods arrived. I closed on the house, and 18 hours later I was on a plane and took over the team of 582 in northern Iraq near Mosul. I was on the team for two years.

Knarr: So how long were you in Iraq with them?

Calvert: That first rotation, I think I came back on Thanksgiving Day and that was 2004. So it was probably maybe three or four months that I was with them in that first rotation and then came back. I trained for probably six months. Then I went back over in the summer of 2005 and went back to the north, got our stuff and moved down to the vicinity of

<sup>1</sup> For attribution purposes we have been asked to use only a pseudonym first and last name for the ODA commander.

Baghdad. Then shortly after we were told, "Hey you're going to go out west." We were out there until 2006.

Knarr: With 582?

Calvert: Yep. And with the standup of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion and the name changes it became 5322.

Knarr: When you went back in the second time, did you know you were going to go out west? You say you brought your stuff down to Baghdad.

Calvert: Actually we were north of Baghdad, so Taji.

Knarr: Okay, Taji.

Calvert: So, yeah, that was kind of a crazy deployment, because we anticipated that we were probably going to go up north prior to deploying [from CONUS]. Then they said, "No, you're probably going to go to Al Anbar," so we actually looked at Ramadi and Fallujah. Then the day before I got on the flight to go over for the initial look, they said, "Actually, no, you're not going to Al Anbar. You're going to the Baghdad area, Taji, so focus there." Then while we were probably in the first month or two months of the deployment, they said, "Nope, you're going to go out west."

Knarr: So, the second time, when did you get into Baghdad or Taji?

Calvert: Probably June of 2005.

Knarr: Okay, and then when did you go out? Did you go to Al Asad?

Calvert: To get to Al Qaim, yes. We did a whirlwind tour. Originally it was just myself and the team sergeant trying to find a place to live, because we had nothing for Al Qaim. We were trying to figure out where we were going to live, who was in Al Qaim, who we were going to train with and try to get the lay of the land. I believe August was the first time we went out there. I'd have to get back to you with timelines. It's definitely before IRON FIST. So, I went up there, came back, and figured out a plan. The Marines were very generous with where we were going to live. That saved us a lot of time for setting up a team house. Then immediately as fast as we could, we got back to Al Qaim and started setting things up. [5:03]

Knarr: How did that go? Who did you meet when you went back out to Al Qaim? I assume you probably got there in late August/September?

Calvert: It was definitely August. There wasn't much lag time between our initial push out there to get the lay of the land, so maybe two weeks. At that time it was still 3/2, so 3/6 hadn't arrived yet and the Iraqi Army hadn't arrived yet either.

Knarr: Then, of course, next you had to start interacting with the tribes?

Calvert: Yep. The original mission was basically, "Go to Al Anbar and Make Things Better. Do tribal engagement, and make Al Anbar a safe place, a better place for the Iraqi people." So it was a very broad mission, which is great for an SF team.

Knarr: What was the first thing you did in regards to starting a relationship with the tribe? What were the conditions on the ground?

Calvert: Little side story. So, trying to get the lay of the land, during our first trip to Al Anbar, we went out to Husaybah. I can't remember how long it was after that huge suicide bomb went off at Camp Gannon [April 2005].

Knarr: Colonel Davis talked about that. He showed us the video.

Calvert: Yeah the video. The video was incredible. So, we went up there. There were no helicopter rides over there, but I would say it's pretty safe to say that area was completely controlled by insurgents. So we took a long convoy ride through the desert from the base at Al Qaim to Husaybah. It was so bad, we couldn't go back that night. We ended up staying there overnight, which was a surprise to me. It was me and one other individual riding with the Marines inside their vehicles, and there was sniper fire, machine gun fire, indirect fire, and a mine strike. I mean it was pretty much everything you could expect. It was like, "Welcome to Al Anbar." So, right away you knew that this was different than most places in Iraq. It was definitely—contested isn't even the right word—insurgents owned that area.

For the tribal part, the Albu-Mahal were basically wiped off the map along the river. There was definitely a lot of bloodshed that was pushed down into Akashat. It was not a good time to be a Mahalawi. There wasn't a whole lot of intel or information on who the tribes were or who were the leaders. Everything was up for grabs. It was definitely figuring out who the key players were. It wasn't just a matter of figuring out who were the tribal sheikhs. I think you knew that from your visit. It's a matter of figuring out who has the true power in the tribe, who's around. If your tribal sheikh was in Jordan, who was the next go to guy the people are listening to? And it's often not the people that you expect. It's also, who are the ones who have true influence in aspects of fear? If there's a

guy from that tribe who people listen to because they're afraid of him and he's a thug or a criminal, that's something you need to know as well. So, a lot of people just look at it as, "Okay check the block. This is the sheikh. We'll go find the sheikh and talk to him". It's definitely a lot more complex. There was a meeting arranged to discuss recruitment for guys into, for lack of a better word, a force, a tribal force.

The long term outlook of what this force was going to be was definitely hard to figure out, you know? The Albu-Mahal definitely wanted it to be a permanent force that was paid for and equipped and that would be the preeminent force in town. I imagine the Iraqi Army wanted it to be something different. Our team, personally, when we thought about working with the Mahalawis our objective was making them into Iraqi Police, especially because there wasn't any Iraqi Police at the time. Their police force was disbanded. There was truly no mayor. They were trying to figure out how this tribal entity was going to become some type of security force and at the same time not kick everybody else out of power as well. So, we wanted to find a mix. That initial meeting was discussed to bring guys into the Iraqi Army, and recruitment was set up for Akashat. I could probably get a date for you. [10:45]

Knarr: Please do. I assume this was still in August/September?

Calvert: I want to say this was late August. I'll see if I can find it written down anywhere, and I'll ask the guys to see what they remember. I'll do a consensus of when it was. I believe it was late August.

Knarr: And who was at this meeting? Was it represented by more than one tribe or just Albu-Mahal?

Calvert: Yep, just Albu-Mahal.

Knarr: Didn't the other tribes want to participate?

Calvert: That's a great question. I don't remember. There may have been one other member of a tribe there that wasn't Albu Mahal, but it was not in representation of that tribe.

Knarr: Was Albu-Nimr ever a player out there that you can recall?

Calvert: I can't recall. I remember reading about them in reports, but it wasn't in our area. It was all reading about what was going on in Hit. But I can definitely find out.

Knarr: Please do, because we read about it in the papers but every interview we had with Kurdi and others from Albu-Mahal never mentioned the Albu-Nimr.



Calvert: Yeah. I would say that the three big players that people talked about were the Albu-Mahal, the Karbulis, and the Salmanis. Any interaction at that time that was with somebody from the other two tribes, I would probably say that guy definitely wasn't representing his tribe. He was there maybe because he wasn't in good standing with his tribe or had allied with the Albu-Mahal. But, I can definitely get clarification to make sure that's a true statement.

Knarr: Sure, if you would please. So, you're in August. You've had this meeting. They've already evidently fled down to Akashat.

Calvert: Yep. When 3/2 was there, it was definitely a difficult situation within the Albu-Mahal. There was a lot of bloodshed. I mean it was guys showing up at Camp Gannon asking for help. There was no beating around the bush. They knew that they were in a difficult situation, and they were definitely appealing for American help. And at that time, it just wasn't there.

Knarr: And why wasn't it there? Was it policy, they didn't trust them? I understand you had just gotten there too, so you're trying to understand what's going on, too.

Calvert: Yep. I would say that the biggest bloodshed that came, I think, was right before we got there. And I would think you would have to ask 3/2, and the RCT [Regimental Combat Team] that was there with them. I'm not sure if it was a policy or not. I'm not sure how much this would contribute, but I imagine that a small aspect of it is that there were Albu-Mahal that were probably not friends of the Americans. I'm not sure what the reason was for not helping them. Other than it might have been that area was controlled by insurgents, and it may not have been seen as feasible.

Knarr: So you had the meeting, and people are down in Akashat. What was your next step?

Calvert: The next step was doing the actual recruitment, so getting the helicopters to take these guys from Akashat to Habbaniyah for training. We had MOD [Ministry of Defense] representatives and sort of a vetting process. There was a medical team, I think, as well to look at the guys for stability for serving in Iraqi Security Forces. Once we had a certain cut off for a number of people, we took the initial batch for training. [15:08]

Knarr: Colonel Ahmed, leader of the Desert Protectors, indicated that 279 were vetted and approved to be recruited into the Army. And 79 were then taken down to Habbaniyah as part of the crew that was going to be trained up with you guys. Does that make sense?

Calvert: Numbers-wise, the first batch definitely wasn't 279. The initial recruitment may have been 279, I'm trying to remember how many guys originally signed up that first day, but I want to say that the first group that we trained was probably 20 guys. 279 I think is probably a good overall number.

Knarr: So then 20 guys were flown down to Habbaniyah, how long was the training?

Calvert: I want to say the training was maybe three weeks? I'm having a hard time remembering. There was a lot going on at that point.

Knarr: Where were you at the time? Did you go down with them?

Calvert: When they were training at Habbaniyah, it might have been just two or three ODA [Operational Detachment Alpha] members, Paul and Justin Whiting, and maybe one other guy. The rest of the team was involved with the Iraqi Army that had just arrived. The 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Army Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Army Division was showing up and the first battalion arrived shortly after we got there. It was quickly involved in operation IRON FIST. We advised guys from that battalion, and we tried to get involved as much as we could. We were definitely involved with Sadah, and they were training in Habbaniyah. I believe the first batch arrived shortly before or maybe during the interlude between IRON FIST and STEEL CURTAIN. I think the main body of Desert Protectors arrived right before STEEL CURTAIN, because there was a very short period of time between getting those guys off the plane and into the fight.

Knarr: Do you know how many people then participated in the fight?

Calvert: I'll get back to you on numbers. I want to say maybe 120. At that point we looked at what's the best way to employ these guys. The key thing the entire time was figuring out the integration. Typically what we had looked at is having them as scouts and low visibility reconnaissance elements. The decision was made that we'd keep the original batch in kind of leadership positions and some elements for a low visibility reconnaissance. The rest were farming them out to the Marines so they could integrate with the Iraqi Army at a squad level to help with the area knowledge and identification of insurgents and everything else.

Knarr: Okay. So you say about 120. Did they come in all at one time?

Calvert: They did. Best of my recollections there were two arrivals. There was the initial batch, which was maybe 20, I'd say no more than 40 and then a whole lot of other guys

totaling about 120. And those guys were largely farmed out, like I said, to different battalions, and we went from there.

Knarr: How long did you spend then in the Al Qaim area with 582?

Calvert: August through January.

Knarr: Okay. Who replaced you?

Calvert: That's a great question. I want to say 10<sup>th</sup> Group Team. I actually know one of the guys who replaced me. I'll ask for his team number if you would like to talk to the team leader or team sergeant.

Knarr: Yeah, I'll give you a card and maybe you could pass it on to him and see if he could contact me. Okay, so now you're going into STEEL CURTAIN, you've broken these down into recon elements that go out with the Marines, now I assume Colonel Razak, Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Division, was there for Steel Curtain?

Calvert: He was. [20:14]

Knarr: So, did any of these guys also go out with his units?

Calvert: In planning with Colonel Davis, RCT-2 and 3/6 was figuring out how we were going to use the Iraqi Army. There were a bunch of different courses of action discussed. The decision was made to integrate the Iraqi Army down to the squad level, I believe. So you had American Forces and Iraqi Army Forces with their Desert Protectors. The US companies and platoons integrated those Desert Protectors. There was probably 24 hours between getting the Desert Protectors off a helicopter and getting them into the fight, so there wasn't a whole lot of lag time.

[But in that time we] tried to explain to the units who these guys were, the benefits that they came with, and the possible side effects. You know, the detriments that they may have as well, because there definitely were a lot of pluses and minuses for integrating a guy from that area into your force. Obviously, our detachment couldn't go around and explain that to every single Marine or every single squad leader or platoon leader, so [we were] talking to battalion and company commanders as much as possible, letting them know what these guys brought to this battle.

Knarr: Can you tell us some of the pluses and minuses?

Calvert: Sure. Obviously any time you have somebody from that area, they're going to know Husaybah and they're going to know Ubaydi. They know their cities. They know a lot of

the people from their tribe and to a lesser extent, members of other tribes as well. It's a tremendous asset when you're going to kick bad people out of an area who have been terrorizing a population to have members of that city, members of that village with you. When you took an element of American and Iraqi Security Forces with a Desert Protector in it and you had somebody from that town, it definitely went a long way for hearts and minds. [It's not just] knowing the area and knowing the people, but they're a representative of that area, so hearts and minds and respect for the Iraqi Government as a whole, probably went up.

Detriments: The Albu-Mahal's were massacred. There was a definite fight where they lost a lot of people. If you have people who lost family members and they know that somebody else from that tribe was responsible for it, you have to keep a close eye to make sure there aren't any reprisals or revenges for past actions.

You also want to make sure that there's no perception that these guys are the new ones in charge and you guys are going to be squeezed out. A lot of times in dealing with tribes, there is a zero sum game approach. [They think] that the Albu-Mahal's are doing well at the expense of the Karbulis and Salmanis. It's definitely a matter of appearing to be doing the right thing and not just doing the right thing. Perceptions go a long way.

Knarr: So, talk to me a little bit about STEEL CURTAIN. You indicated how they were organized to be able to support that. And that lasted about seven to ten days?

Calvert: STEEL CURTAIN? I would say at least ten days. It seemed like it lasted quite a while. I think Colonel Alford and everybody probably agree that it was definitely a good, interesting time. There was a lot of heavy fighting.

For our part, it was making sure that the guys were employed properly and talking to people that we wanted to talk to. We tried to interact with the Salmanis and Karbulis, but made sure that there weren't any negative ramifications for our guys. A lot of that was putting out fires where guys were losing faith or using the Albu-Mahal soldiers inappropriately. You knew it was going to happen and you'd see it early. You'd go and guys would be fingering somebody just because they may have been from another tribe. Or that was definitely a perceived reason. They would say, "This guy is from the Karbulis, he's got to be a terrorist." It's like, no, no. So, [we were] talking to the American Soldiers and helping them realize that just because someone *says* he's a terrorist, doesn't mean that he is. They should find out what reason do we have for believing that and it's not just that this guy is from this area and someone says he's a terrorist. Put him on a

bus, and take him to get interrogated. It's definitely a matter of finding out why he was saying it. But in the same token, you can't just forget the fact that the guys are from that area. If he's saying he's an insurgent or he's been working with AQI, let's investigate it a little bit more and figure out why. But anytime you integrate somebody who's from that area, especially huge numbers, you're going to have good guys and you're going to have bad guys. [It's all about] figuring out who you can trust and who you can't. [26:19]

Knarr: STEEL CURTAIN ended in November. What did you do after that?

Calvert: We stayed in the Al Qaim area. Time was key, because not only were we working with the Desert Protectors, but we were also trying to work with Colonel Razak and his 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade. One, [we were] trying to figure out how to best integrate these guys long term. Long term planning for the Desert Protectors has always been a problem. They were told that this was going to be their own brigade, that there was going to be an Albu-Mahal Brigade with numerous battalions. That's what we were told. It's a much different sell to people than what they originally joined up for when they hear, "No, we're doing this one battalion worth of guys and that's it. And, oh, by the way, they're going to be integrated into the Iraqi Army and wherever the Iraqi Army goes, they go with them." Being the ones on the ground to convey that news and try and make sense of this change was definitely a difficult situation.

[We also had to] try to explain to people other than the Desert Protectors or local security forces, that these soldiers provide little use to you going to Fallujah or Ramadi. If these guys are willing to put their lives on the line and take the risk of serving with Iraqi Security Forces, let's look at integrating them into a local security force, Iraqi Police, or something else. That was a challenge.

Another challenge was integrating them with the Iraqi Army, because the Iraqi Army has a soldier mentality. They have a different mentality than somebody who just wants to serve in that area. Colonel Razak and his battalion commanders obviously knew some of the dangers of working with these guys. [We tried to] integrate in a way that Colonel Razak could trust them, and that there was no long term ramifications. We were big on not just equipping and organizing these guys and now they get disbanded and they take a lot of AKs, a lot of machine guns, HMMWVs [High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles], body armor, and everything. So [we] provided a way to get all those weapons secured and keep them from getting absconded with if this thing did not work out. We never gave the Albu-Mahal weapons. We set up an arms room where we had all our

weapons secure. They took out weapons from the arms room. It's what you would expect from a professional Army and a professional fighting force. They took their weapons out of the arms room. The vehicles were kept at the motor pool; it wasn't kept at their house. That way if things did not work out and if the program was terminated, we wouldn't have had some of the problems you'd seen elsewhere.

Knarr: Well then where did the program go? You talked about potential integration. What happened next? [29:40]

Calvert: When I was there, they started standing up the Iraqi Police. I definitely felt for Colonel Alford a great deal at that point, because we tried to get as much participation from the Karbulis and the Salmanis as possible. I mean, having the recruitment inside Karbala, you try to take every step, and then trying to integrate those guys into the Iraqi Police. And then when 3/7 arrived, my understanding was they were going to be integrated as well. So, some were going to be made into Iraqi Police and some were going to be integrated into the local Iraqi Army until it left. At that point that's when we rotated out. Long term, my understanding was that the split occurred with some staying with the Iraqi Army and some going to the Iraqi Police.

Knarr: So you've got the Desert Protectors that stood up in that area, and I assume they were integrated, or they continued to work with the forces as the Desert Protectors. So, the Desert Protectors were still alive when you left?

Calvert: Yes, and they started to focus less on the name Desert Protectors and more on Brigade Scouts. We wanted to get away from the Desert Protector name as much as possible, especially dealing with the Iraqi Army. So they were the Brigade Scouts, and were integrated into the brigade in that manner. Because, it does great when you're going into an area and you say, "These are the Desert Protectors," especially if you're going into Sadah or an area in Husaybah where there are a bunch of Mahalawis. But dealing with the Iraqi Army, they respect scouts. They would view them differently as militias.

Knarr: What I find interesting here is that you talk about the relationship between Razak, his battalion commanders, and the Desert Protectors. Later on they stood up the battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Brigade in fact really 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade which became the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 7<sup>th</sup> Division. Did Razak have Desert Protectors integrated into his 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade formations?

Calvert: The Desert Protectors became his Brigade Scouts.

Knarr: Did you know whether they remained with his brigade or whether they may have shifted over to this new battalion that was setting up in the 7<sup>th</sup> Division?

Calvert: My understanding—and I am pretty positive—is that when Colonel Razak left, they remained.

Knarr: Oh, okay. I see. They were kind of in direct support and then attached and then detached later once he took off.

Calvert: Right, which would make perfect sense, and that's what I would push for.

Ms. Mary Hawkins: And then they were just primarily Iraqi Police?

Calvert: I guess the understanding was that at some point in Iraq's future, the Iraqi Army was not going to be responsible for security for Al Qaim. And at that point, all of these guys definitely needed to be Iraqi Police or what other local security forces they were going to stand up. So the plan was until that point came, part of them would remain with whatever Iraqi Army element was there for security and part would remain with the Iraqi Police.

Knarr: Was Mayor Farhan there when you were there?

Calvert: Yes. I am trying to think of where he was before STEEL CURTAIN.

Knarr: He had lived in Fallujah, and he left Fallujah in 2004 before the big battle of AL FAJR. But, I'm trying to understand what Al Qaim is. Al Qaim is a district, and every time I hear people talk about Qaim, most of the time I find out that they're really talking Husaybah.

Calvert: Yes. That is absolutely something that I think everyone struggled with. [35:10]

Knarr: On the map it'll show Al Qaim, and it looks like a small city place there, and the beacon is there. So, when people talk about the city of Al Qaim, do you think that's what they're talking about?

Calvert: To my understanding, that's what they mean by the city of Al Qaim. If they don't say the city of Al Qaim, they just say Al Qaim...and it's the district, the region of Al Qaim is what we always considered it from the Syrian border to out past Ubaydi.

Knarr: What did I miss that you think ought to be added about this? You know, we hear so much about the continuance of the Desert Protectors with the Albu-Nimr down in Hit. What would you want to say about the Desert Protectors that I haven't asked you?

Calvert: I think there are a few things. One: understanding the long term ramifications ahead of time. We got to make some decisions from the get go on, "What's the long term plan

for these guys?” So that you can be as straight-forward with them when you start. Because, that was definitely a rough period when you’re explaining that this is as many guys as you’re going to get, and this is what the plan is for you right now.

Equipping the force was one of our biggest problems. All of our vehicles, body armor, and weapons that we were working on getting for the Desert Protectors were being handled like everything else in Iraq at the time, in Baghdad. And we weren’t in Baghdad. Tribesmen who were not Desert Protectors or who were definitely not working with us at the time, went to Baghdad and acquired all the vehicles and the weapons and everything else. When somebody that I would not consider a Desert Protector had all our trucks and weapons, convincing them to bring in numerous vehicles to a unit that was not officially connected with the Army was a challenge.

And then I think just figuring out how to walk that line of working with guys from the area versus avoiding any of the negative repercussions that may come. When talking with General Casey when he came in for the briefing, one of my big things was ensuring not just that the lid was kept on the tribal violence, but that there was an American or Iraqi Army unit not from that area watching and handling things, especially when you’re immediately bringing these guys back into the area where they were wiped out.

A perfect example is, I was standing there when we were questioning a guy that we had wanted for a long time. He was in our top five of guys that we would like to see detained and put in jail. It came up when he was identified hiding in a little refugee camp, which shows the benefits of the Albu-Mahal right there. We walked with the Desert Protectors through the camp just to see if any insurgents were hiding. We found one of our top five, and we brought him over and started doing a little tactical questioning. Major Muklis [Desert Protector leader during STEEL CURTAIN, I think, at the time was standing right beside me. The guy was like, “Hey, yes, I’ve killed a lot of his tribesmen in the past. I’ve probably been detained for it before. I’ll go to Abu Ghraib or to Camp Buka for a few days. I’ll eat my three meals a day, and I’ll be back and kill them again.” And you know, when they [Albu-Mahal] ask, “Hey can you just hand them over to us?” We had to say, “No, that’s not the way that the Iraqi Army and the new Iraqi Government is going to work.” It shows the challenges of dealing with the tribal element. Anybody who tries to make peace and govern Iraq is going to have to deal with this. [41:09]



Knarr: What do you think the legacy is out of the Desert Protectors? As you look back on that and you think about the seed that started the Awakening, where do you think the Awakening really started? Did you think it started in Al Qaim?

Calvert: I do. I'm definitely biased having worked with the Albu-Mahal and seeing the work that the guys on my team did. I definitely think that if you didn't have the success of the Desert Protectors, the Awakening would have been a harder sell. And not just from getting other tribes to stand up. I mean, there are a lot of things involved. One, it showed that if an Iraqi tribe asked for help or Iraqi people asked for help that not just the Iraqi Government, but the Iraqi Security Forces and the American Forces were going to come to their aid. So tribes could stand up to insurgents and terrorists, and they'd be secure. It also showed the American Government, the American Military, and the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi Army that this was a doable thing. Because there were a lot of naysayers at the time well before the Awakening that said that this could not work. I think without the Desert Protectors it would have been a harder sell for the Awakening.

Knarr: Did you see this seed that happened with the Desert Protectors sprout in other areas?

Calvert: Well, Ramadi is not too far away from the Al Qaim region. I didn't work in Al Anbar outside of Al Qaim, but my understanding just from reading reports was that it definitely was getting attention, not just in the region, but nationally. And it was having a ripple effect. My understanding was that it was helping as an impetus for other elements to come forward.

Knarr: Let me give you some background, maybe you can follow on to this if you see where it goes. Some of the Albu-Mahals fled to Syria and some fled to Jordan, because that's where Sabah was. Most fled down to Akashat, but some fled to east of Ramadi. In fact, there's a story that between 100 to 200 Albu-Mahals fled to a segment of their tribe down next to Albu-Souda right east of Ramadi in a place called Sofia. I'm looking for connections. Do you think the seed could have been transferred just from that?

Calvert: I definitely heard of communication between guys. We would talk to guys who were Desert Protectors, and they'd talk about family in Ramadi and further out east. The word was definitely passed. You could see Muklis on his phone all the time during the fights. The word definitely got around. I would definitely think that people in Ramadi, if you lived next to an Albu-Mahal member in that area, you were hearing about what was going on in Al Qaim. It was a tremendous deal for that tribe and for the people in that area.

Knarr: What about in Hit? You've had Fallujah closed off, the bookend on the east side. Fallujah still was very temperamental even then, but still they had some control over it. The insurgents escaped out of there to Mosul, Ramadi, and Al Qaim, but now you've got the Desert Protectors and STEEL CURTAIN to seal off the border. Next you're looking along the Euphrates with Rawah, Anah, Haditha, Hit, etc. What happened to that center piece between Al Qaim and Fallujah? What happened to the Desert Protectors in places like Hit? [45:50]

Calvert: I'm definitely not the expert on why the Desert Protectors didn't work in Hit. I would say that Al Qaim was the perfect synthesis of everything that Al Anbar and Iraq needed. The insurgents made a tremendous fatal error of killing so many people and enforcing [strict] discipline. [They were] not allowed to talk on a cell phone or smoke. AQI set up flags that declared the Islamic Caliphate of Iraq. I mean, the people didn't want those insurgents in charge or around anymore. So you had AQI's big mistake and you had American Security Forces who were willing to do what Iraq needed under RCT-2 and Lieutenant Colonel Alford. They did what was needed by putting the amount of people into the Al Qaim region. That's what we needed for security and to show the Iraqi people that we were willing to take the long steps and go the long route towards security. So, I think [it was] the two of those together and then working with the local forces. Part of it is personal dynamics. I can't speak for what they encountered in Hit, what the tribes were like, and how they viewed Americans or the Iraqi Army, but it was definitely the perfect come together for us for making Al Qaim work.

Knarr: Sa'dun, the Minister of Defense, worked with General Casey and Colonel Ahmed. He talked about MNSTC-I [Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq] helping. General Petraeus was in charge of MNSTC-I at the time. Did you have any connection with MNSTC-I?

Calvert: Definitely not when we were employing the Desert Protectors. I am trying to think if there was as any assistance at Habbaniyah. There may have been some support given to the guys who were training in Habbaniyah once we left, but I can't think of any big assistance we had from MNSTC-I for setting it up.

Knarr: We had read an article by reporter Ellen Knickmeyer who probably had a stringer in the Al Qaim area. She wrote about this sign that Al Qaeda had put out in front of, I assumed it was the arches in Husaybah, that read *Welcome to the Islamic Republic of Al Qaim*. Did you see it? Did you hear about it?

Calvert: I heard about it. I'm trying to think when we went in for IRON FIST or STEEL CURTAIN. There was definitely a lot of propaganda up throughout the city. I mean you would take down leaflets all over. I'm trying to remember if it was Islamic Republic or Islamic Caliphate, but there was definitely a lot of propaganda that was all over the place. I don't remember the Islamic Republic as much as the Caliphate.

Knarr: Another thing, did you ever hear anything of forced marriages between the foreign fighters and the locals?

Calvert: Other than what I had read, I hadn't heard a whole lot of it. Part of that was difficulty in getting information about the Karbulis and Salmanis. The other aspect of working so much with the Albu-Mahal is that it's hard to get the Karbulis or Salmanis to talk to you and try and get information on them.

Knarr: I'll bet! [50:06]

Calvert: Yeah, and explaining that to Americans was also difficult. There were black holes of information about towns that weren't predominantly Albu-Mahal. There weren't a whole lot of Karbulis or Salmanis coming to talk to you, especially if you were seen as working with the Albu-Mahal. So, if I had been leading an element of 15 guys who were all Albu-Mahal, I'm not going to get a whole lot of talk from the Salmani. I hadn't heard about the marriages first hand. I read about it I think in articles, but I'd never seen it directly.

Knarr: No, that's pretty much the same here. What did I miss?

Hawkins: You arrived there at a really interesting time in August when a lot was going on. So, in May you have the first fight between the Albu-Mahals and AQI. You don't really have any US support for Albu-Mahal, they just kind of look at it as red on red fighting. And then AQI goes away and probably rallies up a bunch of people and comes back right when you were getting there, the end of August, and the United States supports Albu-Mahal. I am just curious, do you know how the troops actually supported them? What did commanders find out in that time that made them make the decision to support?

Calvert: One, it was different leadership.

Hawkins: Between 3/6 and 3/2?

Calvert: Yep. I'm not sure if there was different guidance given to both commanders or not. I know that Colonel Alford definitely came up with the plan for how he wanted to take back that region. Ironically, most American commanders weren't putting people into the

cities where they would work and do lasting effects, but he had a plan that he briefed, and people said, "Okay, let's try this."

Hawkins: When did he take TOA [Transfer of Authority] though, wasn't it in later September?

Knarr: Yeah it was, but he had come in for his PDSS [Pre-Deployment Site Survey] earlier. Then when he left, he told Davis, "I'm going to move into the city."

Hawkins: So is this really the first time that this happened or was Tal Afar happening at the same time where they were doing the same strategy of living with the people?

Calvert: I don't know. I definitely remember so many people telling my boss and my boss's boss that this was going to fail and that this was just a bad idea.

Knarr: I'll bet. It was risky, but it worked.

Calvert: That's how we always viewed it. Everybody talks about Ramadi, but I want people to know about guys like Paul and Justin. They are equally important as anybody who worked in Ramadi. [55:48]

The point I want to get across is these two guys deserve a lot of credit for the whole thing. Paul was a senior weapons sergeant on my team. He did the initial training with the Desert Protectors, and he ran the training and so much more for the Desert Protectors. And Justin Whiting was the Senior Medical NCO. The two of them trained, ran, and were the face of the Desert Protectors. Justin was killed 19 January 2008. He actually got out of the Army to go back to New York to be a logger. He decided that wasn't for him and came back in the Army. He was killed outside of Mosul. Those are two names that America needs to remember when they talk about the initial successes in Iraq. Everybody in the team was good, but these two stand out.

Knarr: If there's anything we missed that you think about later, we can talk about part of this over the phone. Additionally, if there's any videos or imagery that you might have that we can use, please let us know. We need to tell the story through media and if the media is not available, the story might not be told. So if you have people that can provide videos or photos or other media such as leaflets or the signs posted in the cities by the insurgents, we can use them.

Calvert: Sounds good. I know I have tons of pictures.

Knarr: Thank you for your time and what you and your team did in Iraq.

4 March 2011

Subject: Interview with Colonel Nick Marano, USMC, former commander 1/7 Marines, Al Qaim

Colonel Marano deployed 1/7 Marines to the Al Qaim, Iraq area of operations from March to September 2006. 1/7 Marines continued the work of 3/6 Marines by living with the people, developing combat outposts, developing the Iraq police force, partnering with the Iraqi Army and expanding their area of control to the east [See Table A-1 at the end of the transcript, listing all the units responsible for the al Qaim area and the time frames they were assigned].



Colonel Nick Marano, USMC, former commander of 1st Battalion, 7th Marines was interviewed at his office at Camp Pendleton, California, on 9 February 2011 by Major General Tom Jones, USMC, Retired. The following is his account of events during his deployment in Al Qaim.

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MajGen Thomas Jones, USMC, Retired: Nick, Bill Knarr and I had a chance to talk to you about three months ago about your experiences. Bill told you he'd like to get you on tape. Obviously, you have so much to offer. Originally Bill and I went down to Camp Lejeune. I was on a different project, but Bill shared with me an audio tape of Steve Davis and Mundy. And of course I've talked to Dale [See Alford transcript in this volume at Appendix A] extensively about his experience. What would be really interesting to capture from you is your brief and the slides and whatnot, but your perspective of how you took over from Dale and maybe a little bit about your PTP [Pre-deployment Training Program], how you were preparing, the turnover, and then how you built upon Dale's experiences, especially with the expansion of the combat outposts, the integration of the tribes, and some of the special people that you met that were integral to your success over there.

Colonel Nick Marano, USMC: Well, to start with, if you look back at the PTP and the program that was evolving at the time in 2006, we were actually the first battalion that went through the complete Twenty Nine Palms/Mojave Viper Program. Before that it had been split up a little bit down at March Air Reserve Base for the COIN [Counterinsurgency] part and then Twenty Nine Palms for what was then called, I think, the ECAX (En-

hanced Combined Arms Exercise) where they took out some of the combined arms parts of the CAX (Combined Arms Exercise). So, I think from a PTP point of view, we had both a more comprehensive kinetic and integrated COIN program together. Instead of having almost two separate programs, we had a comprehensive program than previous battalions, because that's exactly how the battlefield is going to look. You're not going to have COIN on one day and kinetic operations on the other. It's going to be General Krulaks Three Block War every day where you're going to have elements of all of them.

From the service level, we were pretty fortunate in that we were able to take advantage of the integrated Twenty Nine Palms base Mojave Viper. We had command and control systems in the rear at Twenty Nine Palms. We were also able to access via SIPRNet 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines Command Journal on a daily basis. We were getting their daily Intel Brief and their daily Ops Brief. So, from the moment when we got the word that we were going to go to Al Qaim and RIP [Relief-in-Place] with 3/6, we were really able to kind of plug in on a daily basis to their intel and their Operational Summaries and keep track of what was going on in the battlespace. I thought that was extremely important because 3/6 probably had the most dynamic time of any battalion that occupied that battlespace. OPERATION STEEL CURTAIN, a multi-battalion clearing operation run by both RCT-2 [Regimental Combat Team] and the battalion, led to the security situation that was present when we RIP'd out. So we were able to kind of track the development of the battlespace over time. We were able to track, I think, more importantly, via the intel reporting, the people. I'm talking about the local Iraqis, via both the HUMINT [Human Intelligence] reporting and other sources. So we were able to kind of build our SA [Situational Awareness] as to who's who in the zoo so to speak. So I thought that was extremely important, being able to track that in the rear over time.

Then I thought the other important part prior to our RIP was that we did our Pre-Deployment Site Survey a couple of days before STEEL CURTAIN began. I tried like hell to be able to extend and stay through STEEL CURTAIN. I just couldn't make that logistical happen. But we probably had the most fortunate timing in terms of being in the AO [Area of Operations] when the most significant operation that had come down the pike out there was about to unfold. So we were able to sit with Colonel Steve Davis and the RCT-2 staff at Al Asad. We were able to go through the ROC (Rehearsal of Concept) drill with them. We were able to get all the in-depth intel reporting. So, we kind of had almost a bird's eye view literally of STEEL CURTAIN prior to it unfolding, and then obviously, as I said, we kind of tracked it when we were back at Twenty Nine Palms. We

were able to track how the battle went. And then, more importantly, in terms of when we took over the battlespace, we were able to track how the battlespace changed in terms of 3/6's disposition. Colonel Alford, obviously, pushed a lot of units out from what had been just a very few battle positions, and he was able to bring much of the AO under direct Coalition control. [5:48] It really was probably at the time the best example of the oil spot type concept if you look back on it. Not only were we able to go through with a major clearing operation, but then we were actually able to push out and hold the area. And 3/6 had done a pretty good job of starting a lot of the CA [Civil Affairs] and development type projects, which became important. They had started a lot of the governance type work that we took and pushed.

So I think when you look back on things like STEEL CURTAIN, the clearance and being able to extend the control of Coalition Forces is important. But then once you do that, what do you do? Once you have your companies and platoons out in the battlespace, what do you do? Economic development is important. Improving governance is important. Extending not only the capability, but also the trust that the people have for the local security forces is important. Because really the whole counterinsurgency is going to turn on how effective your intel is. That really is the key to it. And that gets directly at the trust of the people—the trust of the people not only in the Coalition Forces, the external forces, which we were, but also in the local security forces. That builds the intel database that you have. That gives you the ability to do much more effective operations, much more targeted operations. So I thought when we took over in terms of being able to RIP out with a battalion that had prepared the battlespace fairly well that we were extremely fortunate in the positions that we were able to roll into—in the relationships with the people that had already been built and in just the general organization of the ground and the concept of operations that 3/6 had driven. [7:57]

Jones: Backing up one bit. You mentioned the PDSS. Give me the timeframe, Nick, if you would please about Mojave Viper, your PDSS, and when you actually knew you were going to go to replace 3/6 at Al Qaim.

Marano: Sure, if I could answer the last question first, sir. Initially, we were going to RIP out in Fallujah. It was relatively late in the cycle. It was about September when division, I believe, made the decision to switch battalions. I think it was good reason. I mean, RCT-7 was going to be out at Al Asad, and I thought it was probably good that the RCT commander had at least one of his battalions that he had a pretty good relationship with that would be out there. So, I think it was about September. Again our RIP date with 3/6 was

that March. So it sounds like it's pretty far out, but as you know, sir, you're beginning planning a year out. So we had already done quite a lot of planning for what was 3/4's AO in Fallujah.

So, I found out about in September. I started tracking, as I said, the intel and the operations mainly via the SIPRNet as to what 3/6 was up to. Our PDSS (Pre-Deployment Sight Survey) was in late October, early November. Mojave Viper followed that, which I thought was extremely helpful. I've seen it go both ways, especially when I came back, and I was the TECOM (Training and Education Command) G-3. I've seen all kinds of different timelines of when battalions do PDSS's and when battalions are able to go to Mojave Viper. Just from my personal experience, I thought it was extremely helpful as a commander to be able to get eyes on the ground and get a good feel for the atmospherics. Again, this was prior to STEEL CURTAIN and we knew things were going to be significantly different after STEEL CURTAIN. We were able to make some pretty good assumptions as to what the security situation would be. And you know, within Mojave Viper, as long as you are within the left and right lateral limits of the service directed exercise, there is a degree of flexibility in what can and cannot be done. And certainly doing white space training out there we had a great deal of flexibility in what we could do. So I thought it was very helpful that we had what we thought was a pretty good feel for the atmospherics, the security situation, and requirements prior to going into Mojave Viper.

Jones: When you got the word, Nick, that you were going to replace 3/6, did you have any integration then with 3/2 about their timeframe there and some of the things they had started before they handed the baton off to 3/6 before you went into Mojave Viper.

Marano: We really didn't have much with 3/2. I know we got some briefs from them. My intel officer had gone to 3/2 and gotten quite a bit from them. I didn't have a great opportunity to spend a whole lot of time with the former CO [Commanding Officer], either with Tim Mundy or any of the other folks from 3/2, so there wasn't a great deal of information. 1/7 was also at that time a little bit unique in that they had been in the battlespace, which I had thought and was able to confirm my hunch. That was good and bad because 3/7 was the first Marine battalion to occupy Al Qaim. 1/7 followed them. When you look at how Marines perceive operations, it's very hard sometimes to break a paradigm. I watched a lot of very competent NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers], Staff NCOs, Lieutenants, and Captains who had been in the battlespace prior. Some of them had a hard time transitioning to how things had changed. Some things changed, and some things didn't. Some of the same people were around. A lot of times with the local Iraqis,



they had been one way in terms of support. They may have been an enthusiastic supporter for a lot of different reasons, so I think it was a mixed value. It was good that a little over half the battalion had already been to Al Qaim. So it was good that they knew the area. And on balance it was a good thing that they had done operations, but sometimes there were some perceptions that definitely had to change because the situation on the ground was different. [13:15]

Jones: Plus the tribal issues changed dramatically with 3/2 and 3/6.

Marano: Right, and the tribal issues are really what I'm thinking about.

Jones: Yeah. So walk me forward then. You do Mojave Viper. You're pretty set now. You replace 3/6. You've had a chance to witness the work up for STEEL CURTAIN. You've had a chance to sit down and spend some time with Steve Davis. Now you're preparing to go to replace 3/6. Walk me through the turnover, if you will, and then what surprises that you found right from the get go relative to the people and tribes and whatnot or what maybe some of the things that were actually confirmed from your study and whatnot.

Marano: Right. STEEL CURTAIN was a very kinetic operation. It was required at the time. There were a lot of bad guys, and a lot of bad guys needed to get killed. So, as we began the RIP process, it was abundantly clear to me that as we were really progressing, probably the most important things that we needed to focus on were some of the economic development type issues. As you look at winning the trust of the people, the initial reaction we got from the people was very positive. The Company Commanders, the Squad Leaders, and the Battalion Commander of 3/6 had done a fantastic job of establishing trust post-STEEL CURTAIN. They were able to move around the battlespace with little to no enemy activity. Just as I saw a little farther east in Fallujah after that major clearing operation, there was a period of time when the insurgents completely go to ground, and we were able to kind of move around the battlespace without a whole lot of enemy activity. That was certainly the situation when we arrived. The opportunity was there to build on that trust that had already been established. A couple of the major tribes had flipped so to speak. Those tribes that had been at best neutral, and really had been hostile to the US effort there, they had flipped prior to OPERATION STEEL CURTAIN. There was actually a lot of red on red type activity that immediately preceded STEEL CURTAIN where some of the tribes had decided that it was time to reassert what they saw as their historical control in the area that had been usurped by what was perceived to be a heavy degree of foreign fighter influence. So, the tribal dynamics, I thought, offered us the best opportunity to be

able to exploit as we showed up. They're not without their pitfalls, because tribal dynamics are extremely complex. It is very hard. I don't care how long you spend studying it. It's very hard for an American to really understand all the dynamics, because there are so many different moving pieces and so many different agendas. It's just hard for us to think that way no matter how much we're immersed in it. [17:03]

So I think 3/6 had it set up very well for us. I did think that we needed to do something about some of the kinetic aspects of STEEL CURTAIN right away. I'll just use one example: all the bridges that span the river had been dropped during the campaign. There was one military bridge that had been re-established. In the turnover, that was something that Dale had told me—that we really need to take a look at the bridges. That was hard! There was a lot of attention all the way up the chain of command all the way back, believe it or not, to MNF-I (Multi-National Forces-Iraq), General Casey's organization, about re-establishing and rebuilding some of those bridges. It took me months to get some of them. But if you just look at the impact on daily life, the folks on the northern side of the river that wanted anything from cooking oil, to flour, to any other type of product, had to come south. That was also one of the agrarian areas, so they had to bring all their vegetables to market on a daily basis, because there was no refrigeration. Things generally cost seven times more on the north bank of the river than they do on the south bank.

Jones: Going back to your economic issue.

Marano: So we're back to those kitchen table type issues and the trust of the people, which kind of lead directly into your intel driven counterinsurgency: do the people trust you and do they provide information? I thought that was going to be the area that I wanted to work on and exploit as quickly as possible...kind of getting things back to normal. It was important to me that we were able to kind of show the people that we were going to get things back to normal. I wanted to get the police on the street. As silly as it sounds, I wanted to have police vehicles on the street just so people saw Iraqi Police just driving around the area as if there was kind of a return to normalcy, instead of armored HMMWVs (High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle) and Marines in body armor. I thought that was important at the time.

Jones: Had Dale started this or is this something that you kind of took off from Dale where he handed the baton and you kind of took it upon yourself?

Marano: On the Civil Affairs projects, 3/6 had done a pretty good job in jump starting it. If you look across the board, we were fortunate, not only in the security situation, but in the

approach that the battalion that proceeded us had taken. So, everything was kind of set up for us. I thought we were pretty fortunate there.

Jones: You mentioned two or three times already, Nick, the economic issues and how they play a role in the people's hearts and minds, if you will. You mentioned how difficult this was. Was that the central issue in your area that really brokered this issue of trust? And then talk to how you really went about working this issue on the bridges and how that led to other Civil Affairs projects.

Marano: Right. I don't know so much if the bridges themselves were the central issue. They were certainly a visible issue. I think the perceptions of the people are important. I think one of the reasons why we were successful in not only flipping some of the tribes, but in building in an "outside- in" where the Anbar Awakening, from my assessment, began out west and kind of rolled east, was that the folks in Al Qaim were a merchant class of people. Yes, religion was important to them, but the religious leaders in Al Qaim had much less of an influence than I saw in a lot of other areas of Sunni Iraq. I'm not even talking Shia areas, but in the Sunni areas in Al Anbar.

So, I think we were first dealing with a merchant class of people. If you drive around Husaybah today, you'll see a lot of those houses were pretty good. I mean, they were big, nice homes, a lot of them on the river. This was not a poor or an uneducated group of people. They were merchant class, and they wanted to do business. And I wanted to do business with them. I thought that was going to be one of the key areas. And to that end things like the bridges were important, because they were visible. Even though about 10% of the population lived north of the river, things like the bridges were important because it was a visible sign of what we were doing. I thought by far the biggest issue was re-opening the border port of entry. That was another one that because of various intel assessments, if the border was reopened at Al Qaim, it would just basically turn that entire river valley into the foreign fighter freeway. I don't think anything could be further from the truth. That POE [Port Of Entry] represented an important link in the economic activity, not only of Al Qaim, but of the whole Euphrates River Valley. I fought constantly, even up to the MNF-I level. General Casey himself flew out, and met me at COP (Combat Outpost) North. I'd flown to Husaybah. We briefed him on the border. He had his G-2 with him. They weren't real thrilled about some Marine out there saying, "We need to reopen the border at Al Qaim." We worked hard, and eventually towards the end of 1/7's deployment, both Lieutenant General Zilmer and General Casey made the decision that we would reopen the border.

About a month before I left, we had the initial contractors come out to do the surveys of how they would rebuild it to reopen it. [23:50] I thought that was a central link, and I thought that that was completely missed by the senior leadership that this was not just an Al Qaim issue. If you look at everyone who lived basically west of Baghdad, they were paying a war premium for every consumer product they had. And a lot of it was due to the fact that everything was coming up the Euphrates River Valley from places like Baghdad or coming down from the north from Mosul. That was another related area not just tribally, but it was easy to get to and from Mosul through the desert. But there was a war premium being paid for all those products, plus there was a lot of economic activity that was not taking place because that POE was closed. So I thought it was far more than just a local and certainly even more than just a regional issue. I thought it had implications across the MEF (Marine Expeditionary Force) AO. I was very happy that General Zilmer, and later General Casey agreed that it would probably be a good idea to reopen that border in the interest of economical development.

So again, I think the fact that we had a merchant class of people, who were largely secular and without a very strong religious leadership is why there was a little bit less ideology there. They wanted to make money, and I wanted to help them make money. I talked to them openly about it. We were able to expand the market in Husaybah. General Natonski, who was a Division Commander at the time came out. I got him out of the vehicle, and we walked through the market in Husaybah. He went, "This is bigger than the market in Fallujah!" He was amazed at the activity. I would walk around and talk to people and ask them just straight up, "How's business? Are things going ok?" because that was important. And it was important that they were making money... it was the whole return to normalcy. You know, it's hard for someone to oppose you if they're making money. I think that was a key part, certainly in the beginning, focusing on economic activity, getting things going again. [26:07]

Jones: This is all linked to this issue of the tribes and that's linked to the POE, but how did your expansion of the combat outpost play to the tribal issues? How did that give you an opportunity to increase this economic development? Is this something that Dale started and then you picked up on?

Marano: I think pushing out from main battalion FOBs [Forward Operating Base] was probably the critical decision in flipping Al Qaim. And then actually starting I think the [outside-in] Al Anbar Awakening. There were a lot of schools of thought and a lot of my fellow battalion commanders who told me they could generate a lot more combat and a lot

more op tempo, so to speak, from one central location and push out...occupy areas for a period of time, you know, basically set up company or platoon sized patrol bases, work out of it, and move around.

At the time, falling in on a battalion that had pushed out permanent battle positions was something novel. We expanded that and pushed farther down the valley to where I thought some natural tribal boundaries were. I think when you look at counterinsurgencies, one of the biggest mistakes we always make is we don't draw our boundaries based on the tribal realities. You see it time after time, we draw these battalion and RCT boundaries that look good on a map and at first blush they may make military sense, but they make no tribal sense. It really does take a little while to be on the ground. And I think after about a month, we started expanding out. I went back to the RCT commander, who was at the time Colonel Blake Crowe. He understood that dynamic, and he actually gave me a couple of large chunks of what were other battalion's battlespace based on our assessment of where the tribal lines were, where we should be, and where, more importantly, the Iraqi Security Forces that we were developing, how they should be laid down that also kind of matched that reality. So I think the tribal boundaries and kind of lining them up to the extent that you can with the military boundaries is extremely important. [28:55]

At a minimum, you have to understand where they are and how the tribes interact. One of the tribes in the area, the Karbulis, ran most of the sheep trade. A lot of the sheep grazed south of the city of Karabilah. There was a lot of kind of waste land that sheep are able to graze on. There was a major sheep market in Karabilah that met every Thursday. One of the major economic realities was the sheep market in Karabilah. The Karbulis controlled most of the sheep market. So when you look at how the pieces and how sheep market works such as they bring them to the sheep market and from there how does it all radiate out, where does it go, all becomes important. Understanding everything about how that market worked became important, so when you deal with the Karbulis, for example, you understand what's important to them. And what was important to them was that sheep trade.

I talked about the border a little bit earlier. The Syrians particularly prized the Iraqi sheep. They thought the quality of it, in terms of lamb, was very high. So for the Karbulis, they wanted that border open so they could bring the lamb to market in Syria who were willing to pay a premium for it. Then they could buy everything from cigarettes to consumer goods, you know, DVD players, you name it, bring them back across the border and sell

them. There was a lot of economic activity that was being stunted and that we weren't maximizing. At first blush, we weren't even paying attention to it. It was just transparent. Marines would drive by the sheep market and go, "Oh the sheep market's up today." There was a whole thread that went with that sheep market that I thought was important.

Jones: You mentioned the tribe and how it's got to be in consonance with your own boundaries. What was the dynamic of the tribe and how much did the tribal boundaries change? We had the infusion of foreign influence, which obviously impacted it. We talked yesterday to a young stud from 3/2, Frank Diorio, who had LIMA 3/2 out in Camp Gannon. He talked about the Albu-Mahal tribe. How did the dynamics of the tribal boundaries change both on Dale's watch and your watch because of these types of influences?

Marano: Well, the dynamics themselves didn't really change, because the tribes had coexisted in that area for a long time. There's always jockeying for position. And I'll use a couple of examples of it, especially as we built some of the governance-type structures. Again, as an American, my assessment is the tribes themselves have norms on how they interact with each other. They have norms from everything from how they split up economic activity so that it's distributed in a way that they think is fair. It's not 50/50. The Albu-Mahal, for example, was the biggest tribe, so they're going to get the biggest cut. But everyone else is going to get his cut. If you look at the development of the police, for example, what became a very important focus of all the tribes was how we were going to split up the officers that were going to lead the police. It took me literally weeks of personally mediating.

The tribes recognized that the Chief of Police, Colonel Jamal, who was an Albu-Mahal, was going to come from the biggest tribe in the area. That was never a bone of contention. Again, I think they had norms on how they viewed things. But then who was going to fill the other officer positions, everything below Chief of Police, became important. There was a lot of horse-trading that went on. It was an important dynamic for me to watch. I was fortunate that we did the police development early in the battalion's deployment, because I was able to watch it and get a view of it. I was able to go back with my battalion 2 [S2, intelligence officer], and we could talk about it and figure out who was who. Who really had credibility among their peers. What sheikhs and what leaders of tribes had credibility among their peers. You'd see the leaders of the bigger tribes defer to a certain extent to some of the junior tribes and give them their say. If they thought they had a fair point, they'd go along with it. If not, they wouldn't. So, I think there were certain tribal norms that they'd all kind of worked out among themselves. [34:15]

Even when it came to violence, they had norms of how the violence among them would be initiated and more importantly, how they would settle the violence. We had a lot of cases of violence, especially initially between the Albu-Mahal and the Karbulis. There was a lot of retribution going on. The Marines in Alpha Company 1/7 called one of the wadis outside of Ubaydi the Body Wadi. Just about every morning we'd go out and there'd be a couple of dead bodies who were shot in the back of the head.

A lot of it was retribution for what had happened pre-STEEL CURTAIN. The Karbulis, and to a lesser extent some of the Salmanis were seen as facilitating the introduction of the Islamists, who were seen as foreigners. As I found out a lot of them may not literally have been foreigners, they just might have come from a different part of Iraq, so they were foreigners. So the Albu-Mahal, who had been the strongest tribe, had been chased out of the area and had gone down to the southwest towards Akashat. Later they formed a lot of the Desert Protectors. So there was a lot of retribution and a lot of violence that was going on on a daily basis. Mainly the fighting was between the Albu-Mahal and the Karbulis and to a lesser extent some of the Salmanis. And then there were a lot of lesser tribes in there as well. That eventually settled down. And again, I think it was because of the norms that they had worked out that. I don't know whether at some point they felt that justice had been done internally, and they stopped it. But I think the tribes themselves can work out a certain amount of even stopping violence between them.

Watching the horse trading was an important dynamic, and then being able to exploit it, too. We had different development projects that would come later, so understanding how the tribes viewed themselves and how we split up some of our development projects became important. Being able to read how the tribe themselves viewed each other was an important dynamic.

Jones: As I mentioned earlier, we talked yesterday to now Major Diorio, who commanded India 3/2. He mentioned a couple things that he passed on to 3/6. One was the East End Lady and the individual that became integral to the Albu-Mahal tribe, who became a part of the Desert Protectors. Who were the key individuals that you fell in on that gave you good intel and allowed you to cultivate relationships. How did you go about that?

Marano: I think a week before the RIP, Mayor Farhan was installed as the regional mayor, for lack of a better word. He was the mayor of Al Qaim, and there's no such city as Al Qaim, so he's kind of like the regional mayor even though his office at the time was one room in Husaybah. He became a key individual for a lot of reasons. Number one, he

himself had been a former Brigadier [General] in the Iraqi Army. He understood intel very well. I thought a lot of the Iraqis, especially the former Ba'athists understood intel, and they did a pretty good job of it in terms of what we would call HUMINT (Human Intelligence). He had a number of his assistants that we developed relationships with that initially were very important to us. We were able to branch out from there. I thought the mayor, who initially when he was established, obviously had to consolidate his position. So at the time, he needed me as much as I needed him. It would have been different if he had been there for a couple of years, but he needed me as much as I needed him. It was a beneficial relationship to us both. We were able to actually exploit a lot of the intel that a couple of his assistants had given us. They worked very closely with the Albu-Mahal.

He was related by marriage. He was not an Albu-Mahal by birth, but his wife was. So he was trusted by them. Because he was not one of them by birth, he also had a certain degree of trust from the other tribes, who may normally have been fearful of the strongest tribe taking over and running the show. So, he had a certain degree of credibility among the other tribes as well. I think the most important part was he had been in the Army. He understood intel. He had people who were actually pretty good at it and who had developed a relationship with us. A lot of the early intel came from those sources before we were able to branch out. It was interesting because Marines call HET (Human Exploitation Team) Teams all kinds of different names, but you certainly would not introduce one of your HET Marines to an Iraqi. "This is my HET Sergeant Jones here. He wants to talk to you for a second." And I thought it was funny that after a couple of weeks, even though I had never used the term around him and I know no Marine ever did, Mayor Farhan was referring to a couple of my Marines who would always talked to him as HET Marines. They understood. They understood very well the game that was going on, and I thought they were actually pretty good at it. So, I think initially having the relationship with the mayor was important. Building his credibility and just keeping him alive was extremely important to us. We built a pretty decent mayor's office, because again, kind of the return to normalcy.

We were able to expand the market on the section of Husaybah that was immediately east of Camp Gannon, what we called Market Street, on the main road. It was important that we cleared it out. There was a lot of damage not only from STEEL CURTAIN, but numerous suicide truck bombers. The area literally looked like it had been through a war, which it had been. So we cleared all the debris out. We got the roads so that at least the grid of the road was back up. There may not have been buildings, but there certainly



wasn't rubble anymore. We cleared all that. The roads were back so that you could drive down them again. We rebuilt his office and kind of made a big deal out of that. Because again, the return to normalcy: we were building governance and we were empowering the locals. That became an important aspect of it.

After a few weeks, every time I would show up unannounced at his [Mayor Farhan's] office, I would always notice who was in his office. And that also developed over time. And he ended up becoming someone that the people had a great deal of trust in. It took a little bit of time, but the people he was talking to always varied. It wasn't the same cronies in other words. It was people who were coming to him the way that you would think that people who would petition the mayor for whatever it is that they wanted were there.

Something else that I got from him...we don't think of it this way, but Iraq was a unitary state. The Ba'ath Party was very detailed in the records they kept, the degree of legality in terms of who owned the land, and the records of who the male head of household was in the area. As we were building our databases in terms of census patrols and things like that, I was able to bounce off of the mayor and get his records, which were very detailed. We kind of think Iraq was just some crazy country; it wasn't. The Ba'ath Party maintained pretty effective control of the place, and they had pretty good records of who lived where. It was important to them because as they administered the Oil for Food Program, every male head of household had an identifying card so that he was able to get his monthly allotment of cooking oil, flour, sugar, tea, and whatever else they got from the Oil for Food Program. [43:26] So there was an extensive database that we were able to access via the mayor as to where people lived. We were able to confirm what we had to what their records were. So the relationship with the mayor was important.

The relationship with the tribes was extremely important. 3/6 had done a good job with the Albu-Mahal, again, the strongest tribe in the area. That would always be the most important relationship. The sheikh who was in the area, Sheikh Kurdi, was very supportive. He was a nephew of Sheikh Sabah<sup>1</sup>, who lived in Jordan. In the Arab way, he was the one who had all the money and all the authority. He was in Jordan where it was safe. Sheikh Kurdi was the local, but he was a reliable source. Dale Alford had actually cultivated a very good relationship with him and that continued. I think it continues to this day.

<sup>1</sup> Sheikh Sabah was actually the nephew and Sheikh Kurdi was his uncle.

The other tribes were still a mixed bag. Certainly with the Karbulis, it was the least best relationship, if I can term it that way. And I put who I thought was going to be my best company commander in dealing with people. He's not often your best kinetic company commander, but he's going to be the company commander who understands the insurgency and understands how to deal with people and how to talk to people. So I put who I thought was my best company commander in terms of being able to establish trust, Charlie Company. He did a fantastic job. And he took things to a different level, I thought. He expanded, and it was something that I didn't realize until halfway through the deployment. We should have been focusing on the women from the start. And we're not without assets in terms of focusing on the women. The women really in a lot of ways are the key to the counterinsurgency. We don't look at them that way in a traditional society. We think they have no power and no voice. Well, when the door shuts on the house they have as much a voice as a wife anywhere in this world does. And if the women think that the situation is improving, they're not going to let their husbands or sons attack you. I mean that's just a fact!

We were very lucky that we had, not only some women Civil Affairs folks that we were able to tap into from the regiment, but I had an ER (Emergency Room) female doctor that I got out on the road. It took a lot. The Navy medical folks did not want their doctors leaving the wire. I thought it was crazy. We went out and did everything from well baby, well woman, you know all kinds of female exams and things like that. A lot of the women had never even known there was such a thing as a female medical doctor. And in the course of that, they would pass her information. So, my female ER doc became a fantastic source of intel because, here's a women who had a sick baby or who had never had a well baby check up or anything like that and thought that things were getting better and would tell the doc where the bad guys in her neighborhood were. So, focusing on the women became our focus over time. Captain Bernear, who was my Charlie Company Commander understood that. He actually brought some female Civil Affairs folks, and we ran what at the time was the first female engagement. They had a couple of meetings. We kind of got the ball rolling in terms of being able to engage on a female to female level with them. It's hard for a male to do it in that society, but we're not without assets in terms of being able to engage the women. And I think if I had to do it all over again, boy I would have had a much larger focus on engaging the women for a lot of reasons. Captain Bernear, working in Karabilah with the Karbulis, was able to flip them to our

side. I think that was when we really started gathering the steam in terms of being able to make progress in the area.

Jones: You mentioned that the kinetic is connected to COIN and you expanded your combat outposts. Talk to me about the information that we started gathering from the young NCOs from the street. This was before the CLIC [Company Level Intelligence Cell] became an official term. Talk to me about CopLink and the young NCOs. What kind of information were they coming back with...and the kinetic actions of the patrols, and what-not. How did that provide you more information and give you a better idea of how to integrate your plan of attack for embracing the tribes?

Marano: Well, I think to go back to our PTP cycle, there's a now retired L.A. Police Detective Sergeant named Ralph Morton, who I knew well from previous Iraq deployments. I came to him prior to getting into the meat of our PTP cycle. I asked him if he wanted to work up with us, and if he'd be interested in going back to Iraq? Ralph is a great patriot, and he said he would. He brought with him an extensive knowledge of police work. Depending on where you are in the counterinsurgency, a lot of the insurgent cells look a lot more like a L.A. street gang than a transnational terrorist cell able to hijack an airplane and bring a building down. They are much closer to being the Crips and the Bloods than they are to being that transnational cell. So, I think the most important thing we did early in the PTP cycle was develop what we would call the "cop on the beat" mentality among the squad leaders and the Marines that would go out and do the patrolling. That was our focus—being able to establish that law enforcement type mentality. If you look at what police do when they drive around an area. It is a very active observation that a cop does. [50:40] Too many Marines will just patrol down a street and look around. No one shoots at them, and they'll go back to the patrol base, the FOB (Forward Operating Base), or the battle position. The patrol will say, "Oh, it was uneventful. Things are good. No one shot at me."

When a cop walks down the street, he's got a completely different attitude. He's looking at everyone. He looks at the bulge underneath the clothing. He looks at the shoes that everyone has on and notices that the two young military aged males standing next to him both have the same type of new sneakers on. So with the cop mentality, the Marine would walk up to those two military aged males and start questioning them. "Why do you both have those type of shoes on?" There's probably a story there. And it was that type of mentality that we wanted to instill in the Marines. And it was important that they got it from a credible source who had worked in some of the gang areas of L.A.

We expanded the battalion S-2, Captain Todd Pillow, the battalion OPSO (Operations Officer) at the time, Major Dutch Deets, had gone out to a number of big city police departments. We kind of expanded our information gathering on how other big city police departments approached the job and how they did it. There were different techniques that worked for them and things that we thought that we could bring in to the counterinsurgency fight in Iraq. Everything from the Chicago Police, for example, placed a lot of stock on surveillance cameras. In some of the heaviest crime areas, they had a lot of empirical evidence that said when they put police surveillance cameras up, it cut down the violence in the area, because the people knew they were under surveillance. Sounds like a no brainer, but being able to convince higher headquarters that we needed to put police surveillance cameras on every street pole in Husaybah was almost impossible for me to do, because it kept getting interpreted as we're trying to do force protection. I'm like, "This has nothing to do with force protection! This is counterinsurgency. We're trying to get intel. We're spreading the ink spot at the same time we're gathering intel."

Phoenix, for example, had a very good database called CopLink. We had different databases that we were using at the time. The only similar database that could have worked that really was not effectively being utilized was BATS [Biometric Automated Toolset System]. BATS has since become much more effective. So the Phoenix Police Department was happy to give us CopLink. When we went to Mojave Viper, my battalion 2 employed CopLink in both training exercises. When we deployed we employed CopLink extensively. The battalion 2 maintained the master battalion database as to who's who in the zoo. On every Friday, we'd have a commanders meeting. The company commanders each brought in a thumb drive that updated that week's census patrols. And again, we were not just looking for the male head of household, but every male who lived in that house. So, we were building our database on the people who lived there, the vehicles, and the license plates of the vehicles—again, the cop-type mentality. It was amazing to me how many Marines didn't pay attention to license plates. License plates told a great story in Iraq. So many Marines would just see a vehicle drive by and go, "Ok. It's a vehicle." Well yeah, it had a license plate from Basra. What's that vehicle doing here? Maybe you should go chase it down and find out! So again, it was that cop on the beat mentality. And more importantly it became that CopLink database that we built. I talked about also being able to bounce our records off of what the mayor had. That became important especially when we were targeting someone. It was important that we knew we

had good intel and good information as to who he was, where he lived, and who his associates were. You know, you were building a link diagram on that person.

So I think during the PTP, Ralph Morton's assistance was absolutely essential. It helped us out incredibly. It created that mindset that really enabled the squad leaders to function much more effectively. You really need to focus on the squad leaders who are going to do those urban patrols and equip him so he knows what he's looking for. For example, the materials that go into building an IED (Improvised Explosive Device). If you look at a pressure plate IED, that's not a simple thing to build. You need to have welding equipment. You need to have certain types of angle iron, and the angle iron needs to be welded together.

We divided up every urban area into a grid system. And every squad was assigned a specific area of responsibility within the grid system just the way a cop would be given. That was his beat so to speak. So within that, he would go out and identify all the important aspects that were in his area. He'd identify the places where welding equipment was. He would then look at all the different angle iron that was available. You know, if we're talking about things like pressure plate IEDs. So then that particular individual, who owned the welding shop and who could also produce IEDs, got visited every day by a Marine squad. Just a friendly, "Hi, we're checking on you." Just so he knew we were watching him.

Same thing if you look at electronic shops. At the time, long range, cordless phones were the initiating weapon of choice for IEDs. There were only a few places that actually sold those long range cordless phones, and it was important that the Marines knew every store in their area where they had the long range cordless phones. Now they knew we started watching it, so a lot of times when you'd walk in the store, there'd be none available. But all it took was offering the guy some money and he'd go, "Hang on one second." He'd run out to his car and come back with a long range cordless phone. So, being able to have that inquisitive, investigative mentality at the squad leader level, I thought was huge. And I thought being able to input it into the training program and the PTP cycle was even more important.

In addition to things like CopLink, we ran complete digital command and control. And again, now every platoon who deploys to Afghanistan has VSWAN (Video Support Wide

Area Network)<sup>2</sup>. We ran at Mojave Viper a complete MDAC (Microsoft Data Access Components) network so that every company and platoon had digital C2 (Command and Control). I had digital C2 with a company and platoon. We were able to do all kinds of things that way. Once the company commander has digital C2 in his vehicle, now all kinds of things become available—for example, the Scan Eagle UAVs that were flying. The MEF G-2 figured out a way that you could actually push the video of the Scan Eagle over the MDAC. So a company commander is getting ready to do a raid at night. We've got a Scan Eagle up flying. It's not full motion video because it's going out over a UHF (Ultra-High Frequency) system, but he's looking on his MDAC, and he's got real time imagery of his target house. So being able to input that degree of sophistication in the PTP is important. We're doing that. We've got better gear now, and we've got more of it. I think there's a greater understanding how important digital C2 is, but at the time hardly anyone was using it because, frankly, it was something that people didn't know.

[1:00:00]

[Tape interruption]

Jones: Nick, before we ran out of tape, we were talking about CopLink and how you were taking different things from different folks. If somebody were to ask me one of the most significant things we've made progress on in Iraq and Afghanistan, it would have to be company level type intel.

Marano: Right.

Jones: And now we've got CLIC, and the CLOC [Company Level Operations Center]. We've got BATS. We've got HIIDE [Handheld Interagency Identity Detection Equipment]. We've got Marine Link. But at the time you were in Iraq, we didn't have those things. But obviously a lot of things you're talking about gave rise to the Company Level Intel Cell and the Company Level Ops Cell. Talk to me if you will about some of the things you did at the battalion level that you pushed out to the companies and then how that allowed you to share with others, and how that may have evolved over your deployment.

Marano: Right. Well I think to start with I benefited from having an experienced S-2, who had been in the area and understood the battlespace. So, as we did our PTP workup we brought in things like CopLink and the law enforcement-type mentality stuff. We devel-

<sup>2</sup> VSWAN provides the tactical commander with near-real time streaming video on the battlefield.

oped this not only for each company, but we even took it down a couple of notches based on the battle position layout. We were able to get through the MEF Intel Battalion a plus up of some people. The intel battalion at the MEF was interested in maintaining a certain degree of relevancy among the analysts that were mainly located back at the...I forgot what they called the MEF Intel Organization. It'll come to me in a second. But they wanted to have a certain amount of relevancy, so they wanted their analysts to have direct operational experience.

So we were able to get a plus up through the MEF Intel Battalion of intel analysts. To every company we sent two or three Marine intel analysts. We were able to equip them with digital C2 back to the battalion from wherever their company FOB was located. In addition to that, we increased the size of our Scout Sniper Platoon. We had a four company maneuver base. We didn't employ weapons company as a weapons company but as just another maneuver company. So we had a four maneuver company base and each one of them had what has now been called a Company Level Intel Cell of trained intel Marines, who were also trained on the systems and had digital C2 back to the battalion. We increased the size of our sniper platoon, so that we also pushed out an eight man sniper squad with two school trained snipers and then six additional Marines. So the company commander really had a pretty effective intel organization at his level. He had not only the sniper squad that he could employ in direct intel gathering, but he also had the ability to analyze and target at the company level with his intel Marines. If you look at operational construct and task organization, I think that was the most important thing we did early on. We plus'ed up the number of intel Marines in the battalion and then pushed them out to the companies.

The company commander really had his own organic intel capability, not just in terms of gathering it, but he could do analysis at his level. These Marines had a pretty high degree of sophistication. They all came from the MEF, so I think that was a very effective use of an asset that paid just huge dividends over time. Things like the CopLink database provided the glue, but it was really those Marines who were out there and the ability of the company commander to do things that previously only battalion's had the ability to do. And then even lower.... you could push that depending on the position. You could push that out as need be to a situation where we had platoons very often that were in an independent position that we were able to give some type of an independent intel capability. I think if you look back at what the French in Indo-China talked about, the oil spot concept, really that was all predicated on intel and being able to separate the people from the

insurgents, gain trust of the people, and then get intel from them. That is how the oil spot spread or didn't spread if you didn't do it right. So, it was all predicated on that intel gathering analysis and being able to fuse it across the battalion battle space. [1:05:54]

Jones: Paint me a picture if you would Nick, from where you took over from Dale and how you evolved over the seven month deployment relative to combat outposts and how you saw your whole battlespace change over your deployment. And tie it back to your success with what the companies were doing with these assets.

Marano: Well again, the battlespace over time changed not only in physical size. As I said a little bit earlier, the RCT Commander at the time, Colonel Blake Crowe, understood the dynamics. We were able to expand the size of the battalion battle space. Also some unforeseen things happened where we initially had an Army stryker battalion that was north of us. They were pulled as one of the surge battalions into Baghdad, so we naturally just had to expand the battlespace north. It turned out to benefit us. So, over time the size of the battlespace changed. Also, the dynamics in it changed as enemy activity changed, which naturally was going to pick back up once the kinetic aspects of STEEL CURTAIN had worn off. The enemy activity did pick back up again. In some of the areas that had less coalition coverage. In some of the areas where we expanded into for example, we probably had some of the heaviest contact. There were sanctuary type areas that the enemy was not going to give up without a fight.

As you gauge how effectively were we employing our assets, I think the IED find to IED strike ratio is an important aspect of how well you are doing intel wise. Are you finding any IEDs or are the IEDs finding you? At the time I think it had historically been about 50/50. We started off extremely high. For the first couple of months, we had anywhere from about 70% to 80% IED finds. It was even higher in some areas. And then if you kind of drill down a little bit more and look at the types of IEDs, you'll find that a lot of the IEDs were incomplete. And this is a common enemy TTP (Tactics, Techniques and Procedures). Depending on the enemy cell, they may have a couple of different people that are involved in constructing the IED. [01:09:06] The low price labor, for example, may dig the hole and put a couple of 152mm shells in it or something like that. Maybe a person with a little bit more skill comes along later and weaponizes it. Then the IED is ready to go. Well, someone may have seen that first group of people digging the hole and putting the 152mm shells in there. So we had a very high percentage of IED finds that we would classify as being in that incomplete category, meaning they were not fully weaponized and not fully ready to go.



You're constantly looking for what empirical evidence do I have to know if we are winning? How effective are we? I think statistics like that were important indicators. As time went on, our percentage of IED find to IED strikes went down a little bit. We were still well above the average. As we moved out into areas where we didn't yet have that intel network set up, we were hitting more IEDs.

So, as you look back on how the battlespace changed, you'll find that as we expanded, it got a little bit more kinetic. Naturally, after a major operation, you're going to kind of quell everything. You've taken down a lot of networks, and it takes the enemy time to re-establish things. So over time, the kinetics rose as we expanded the battlespace. In the areas that we had not been in before, the kinetics were higher.

The other important dynamic was the development of the police. I think the police are more important than the Army. The police are locals. They've got much better intel than the Army. You talk to an Army Major about enemy activity, and he says, "The bad guys are in that village." Ok, good. I can't do anything with that. What do you want me to do? Ok, I'll just bomb the whole village. The police on the other hand, will tell you exactly who the bad guys were by name and what houses they were in. So I thought we got intel that we could actually roll on from the police far more than we did from the Army.

When we showed up, Dale had already done the first recruitment for the police. I think we had 200 or 250 IPs [Iraqi Police] that were going to the Academy. When they got on the street, we did another major recruitment. I think when we left, we had something like 1,200 IPs on the street, and there were police stations in every area. General Zilmer and General Neller both understood the importance of having an effective police force, and they were very supportive in getting us vehicles. They didn't just get us weapons, but communications gear, radio base stations, and all that type of stuff, so the police could actually function as police. And I think that was the other major dynamic over time that influenced enemy activity in the battlespace. And that was the increasing numbers and effectiveness of the police. I don't want to overstate how effective the police were, but putting 1,200 police on the street is going to have an effect. And I thought the effect was positive, and again, I thought it fed a little bit not only into direct counterinsurgency, but also in the return to normalcy. You know, I kept talking about how the war needs to be over. The war's over. We're rebuilding. Everything's normal again...[01:13:11]

Jones: Well, just the fact that you could do that as opposed to two years prior to that when you couldn't do it at all is an indicator that things were changing. You made a comment earli-

er, which I agree with, that the Awakening crept from the west to the east. Paint a picture of how you saw this over your seven months and the change in general. Then maybe give me some specific examples when you turned the baton over to the next guy.

Marano: Well again I think a lot of it is based on not just literal tribal boundaries, but tribal alliances, if I could use that word. A lot of the tribes had networks of other friendly tribes in the area. Most of the time the sheikh of the tribe was only important if he could deliver the goods, which are economic activity whether it was government contracts from Saddam or some type of merchant activity. The tribes themselves had built networks throughout the river valley. All the way down to Ramadi there were friendly as well as similar tribes that were in the Al Qaim region. If you look northeast all the way up to Mosul, there were friendly tribes.

I talked about Sheikh Kurdi a little bit earlier. His son was injured seriously enough that he needed to go to a major hospital. I got approval from the MEF. We were going to actually medivac him all the way back to Baghdad. Sheikh Kurdi was appreciative of that, but he said he would take him up to Mosul, because he had some of his cousins up there. According to Sheikh Kurdi, the hospital up there was one of the best in Iraq. He was going to send his son up there. So I think there was not only that physical network and economic network that the tribes had built, but more importantly, I think it represents kind of the decentralized nature of Sunni Iraq where word of mouth becomes important. The credibility of U.S. Forces and how we were working together with them became important. And I think what the tribes in Al Qaim thought and said [became important]. We talked a little bit about Sheikh Sabah back in Jordan. A lot of the Al Anbar tribal leaders were in fact in Jordan. I know the MEF had done at least one engagement that I am aware of where I think they actually met with them in Jordan. So there was a lot of discussion about what was going on in places like Al Qaim. I think that influenced what other people were thinking and saying and doing in other areas all the way to Ramadi and even beyond.

Jones: What else do you think that you'd like to apply that I didn't hit on or we didn't get a chance to talk about that would help Dr. Knarr paint this picture for others? His approach is at the four star level and even down to Sergeant belt buckle at the squad leader level relative to the value of the way he's going to put this all together. What pieces did we not talk about that would be valuable for this?

Marano: To be honest, I think we hit on most of the important ones. If I could just bring up a couple, especially as I am watching what's going on in Afghanistan. I know you know a lot about the 2006 Lebanon War in Israel, sir. I was watching that on TV as I was in Al Qaim. I was shaking my head, because I couldn't believe how stupid the Israelis were. When I went to TECOM, I had an opportunity to go there and go through some of their AAR (After Action Review) with them. The most important lesson learned they had is they had separated out the lower level COIN part. They didn't call it COIN, they called it LIC, Low Intensity Conflict. But they had separated that out from just traditional warfighting capabilities. So, they had units when the time came that were not capable of compositing back together and fighting a combined arms fight. They found themselves in a serious combined arms fight, and they were not capable of pulling it off either at the tactical or at the operational level. So I think it's important that we keep those two aspects together. There really is no difference. As Marines we developed the concept of the Three Block War, and we don't even talk about it. That was a brilliant concept, and Marines don't even talk about it anymore. That is absolutely the correct concept. It's the Three Block War. It's what we're doing. So I think that'd be the only thing that I would offer, sir. [1:18:36]

Jones: Great! I think you did a super job!

Marano: Thank you, sir.

[Tape interruption]

Jones: Now if you would walk me through the slides and kind of emphasize those salient points that amplified what we discussed.

Marano: Sir, I'm going to rip through a couple of the orientation-type slides just to kind of set the ground work. If you look, the battalion was located at this purple line right here, the Syrian Border.

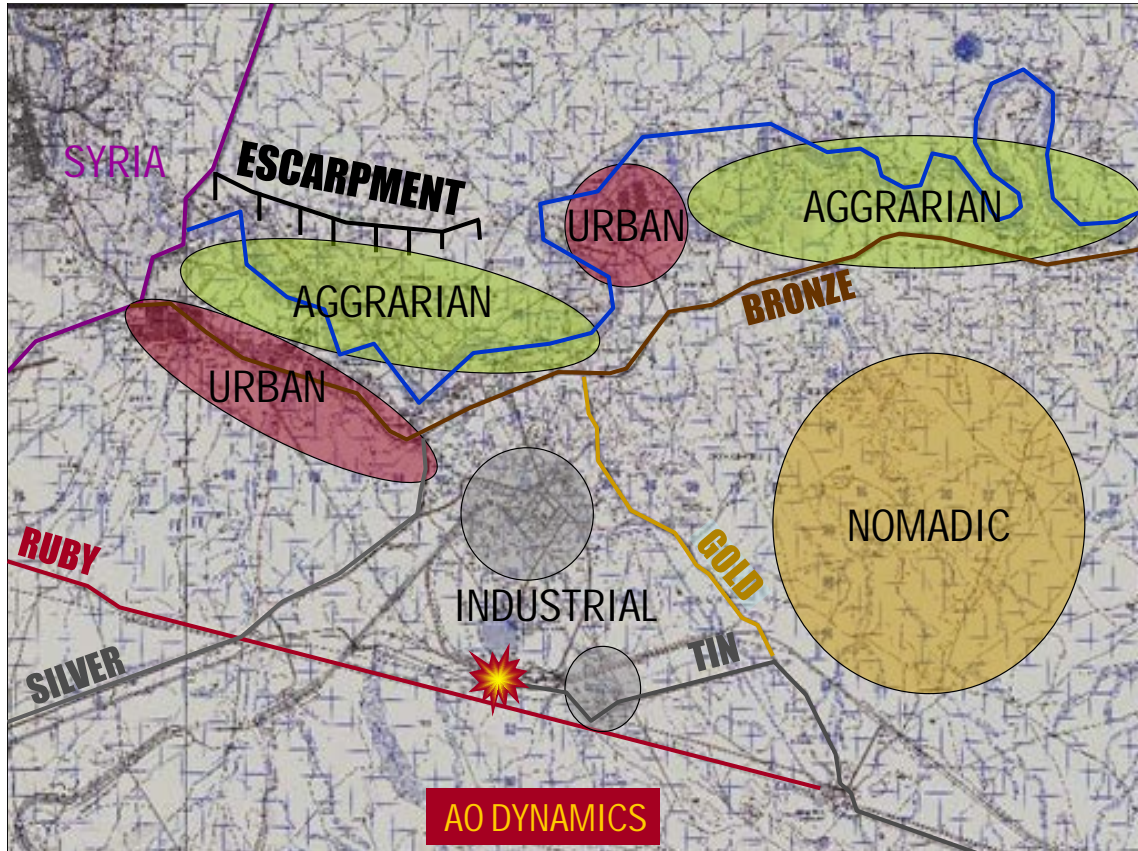


Figure A-29. Area of Operations Dynamics

The Euphrates River ran through the area. Most of the urban population was clustered in just a couple of locations along the river. They are adjacent to some heavy farming areas. There was also a lot of nomadic activities, sheep grazing, that type of economic activity. Al Qaim was also the center of a couple major industrial projects that had been built under Saddam. There was a major phosphate mine to the southwest down in Akashat. The battalion actually occupied a train depot. There was a major fertilizer as well as a cement factory in the Al Qaim area. They were down to about 10% of their prewar industrial production in terms of fertilizer and concrete output. But the train ran from Akashat into Al Qaim. The cement factory and the phosphate plant would produce their goods, and then the train would run down the rest of the Euphrates River Valley, all the way down into the Baghdad region. [1:20:40]

I'm going to start very briefly with the AO. This is 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines battlespace as they took over from 3/2 in the spring of 2005.



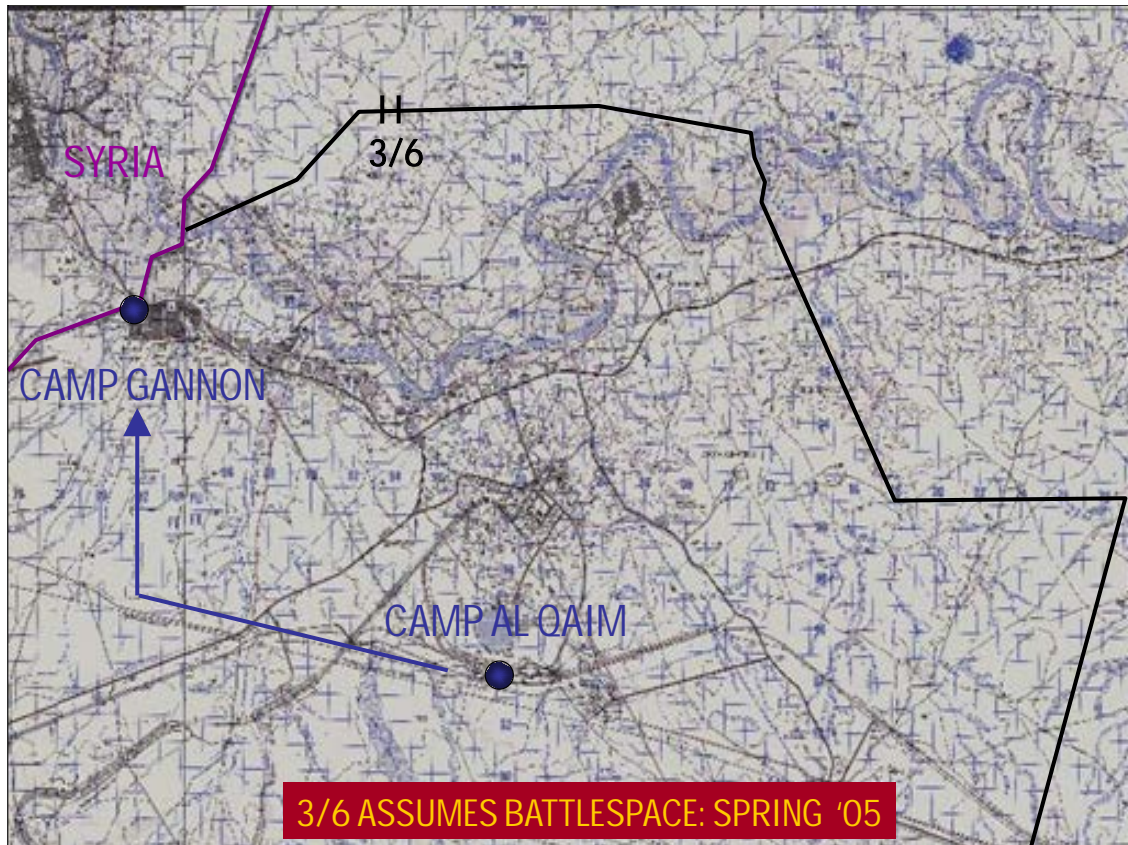


Figure A-30. 3/6 Marines Area of Operations

I'm going to run through these quickly, but I think it's important to set the scene with 3/6. Everything that they did set up what 1/7 was able to do. None of what 1/7 did would have been possible without Dale Alford preceding and without the Marines from 3/6. They really had two FOBs [Figure A-30]. One was Camp Gannon, which was on the border in the city Husaybah. The prewar population was about 150,000 people. It probably went down to just under 100,000 at about this time. Camp Al Qaim itself was located at a train depot. There was really no population around the battalion FOB. All the population lived here in the river valley. 3/6 launched a number of operations that preceded OPERATION STEEL CURTAIN. You can see IRON FIST, [not included here – for a complete briefing on 3/6 operations see Colonel Dale Alford's transcript in this volume] which immediately preceded STEEL CURTAIN. They set up a number of patrol bases or battle positions that would later be expanded throughout the battlespace. You can see north of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines was a Stryker Brigade that I talked about. That was an interesting unit. That was actually the Reconnaissance Squadron of the Stryker Brigade. That particular unit was trained and equipped to operate as a Corps covering force. And I thought they had a number of im-

portant assets that as we look at what should battalions in a counterinsurgency have, they didn't have a lot of dismounted troops, however they had tremendous intel gathering capability. They had their own tactical UAVs [Unmanned Aerial Vehicle]. They had significant SIGINT [Signals Intelligence] gathering capability. Again, this was the Reconnaissance Squadron for the strykers that was going to operate in the Corps security areas. We kind of look back at the Fulda gap type scenario. So they had all that high end intel gathering capability. I thought if every battalion had that it would be tremendous!

STEEL CURTAIN was a major and multi-battalion effort that took place in the late fall, November/December of 2005. In addition to 3/6 a number of other battalions attacked from west to east, down the valley from Camp Gannon in Husaybah. Then they cleared the city of Ubaydi. So they cleared the major population center. There was a major fight, and this really kind of set up everything that took place from that point on. Dale Alford then set up a number of battle positions. So this was kind of the whole ink spot concept where he went back into areas that he had cleared and through either company or platoon size battle positions, they went back into those urban areas. Again, this is where all the population is and they were seeded with battle positions. More importantly, they were partnered with Iraqi Security Forces that at the time were all Army units. So, that was late fall. [1:24:13]

When 1/7 RIP'd with 3/6 on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the battalion battlespace looked like this. [Figure A-31] I spoke a little bit about expanding the battlespace. I went back to my RCT Commander based on where a lot of the enemy activity [was], and more importantly, where the tribal boundaries tended to lie and where we were getting a lot of intel reporting. We were able to push farther west and get into some of the villages along the river. We had a lot of intel reporting in terms of sanctuary type areas and things like that. So, we were able to push and occupy at the time what I thought were natural tribal boundaries that extended farther east towards the city of Anah and Rawah, which 3<sup>rd</sup> LAR at the time...

Jones: Are these green spots here, Nick, new combat outposts here? [Figure A-32]

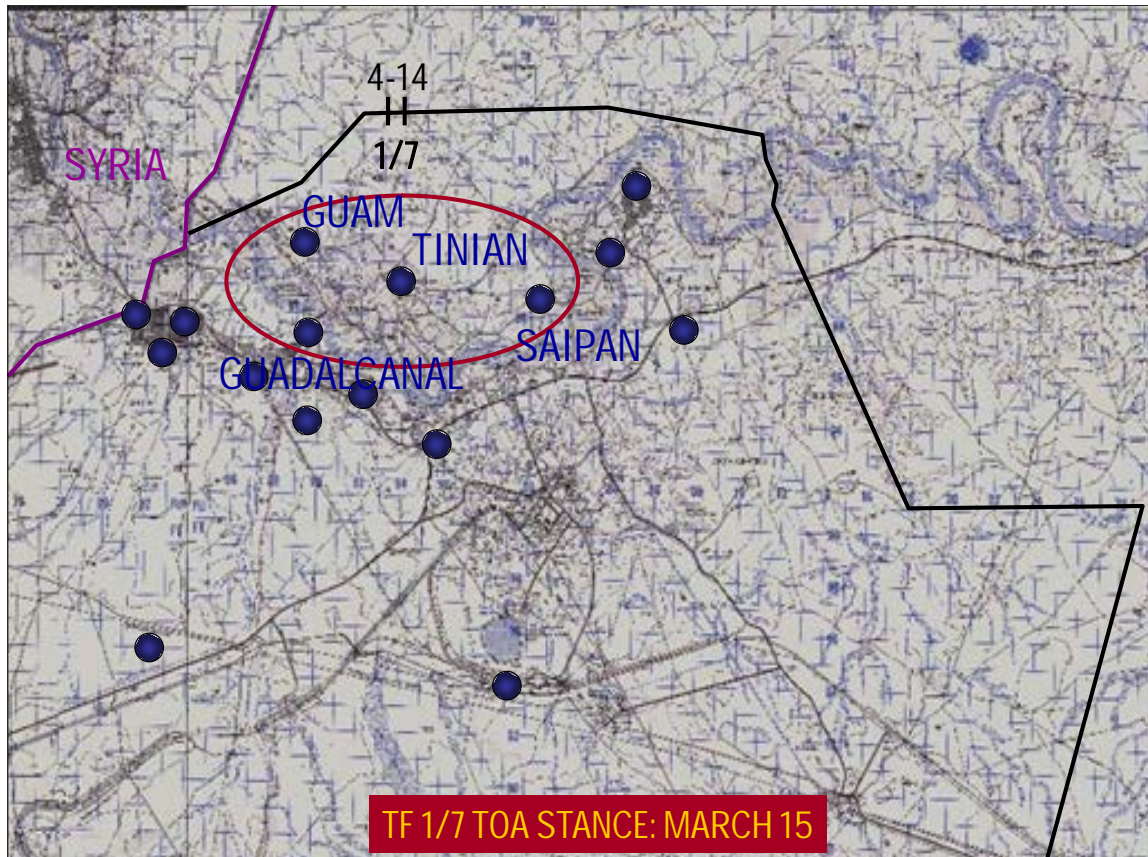


Figure A-31. TF 1/7 TOA Stance, 15 March 2006

Marano: These are new combat outposts that we established. And again, it was to expand that ink spot type concept or that oil spot type concept out so that you're in all the populated areas.

Jones: What would you have in your combat outpost, reinforced squad or what?

Marano: It varied. As we expanded out, this was a squad sized position here, and this was a reinforced platoon. I actually put a couple of tanks and some 81's out there. There was a lot of enemy activity that took place right here. Again, these had been kind of sanctuary areas, and they weren't going to give that up without a fight. We extended also in the southeast. This is the village of T-1. We had natural Albu-Mahal, in this case, down in the village of T-1. We had natural tribal areas down there [primarily a single, heterogeneous tribe]. So, that was a good fit. We were able to stand up a police station down there and extend the reach of the battalion security area.



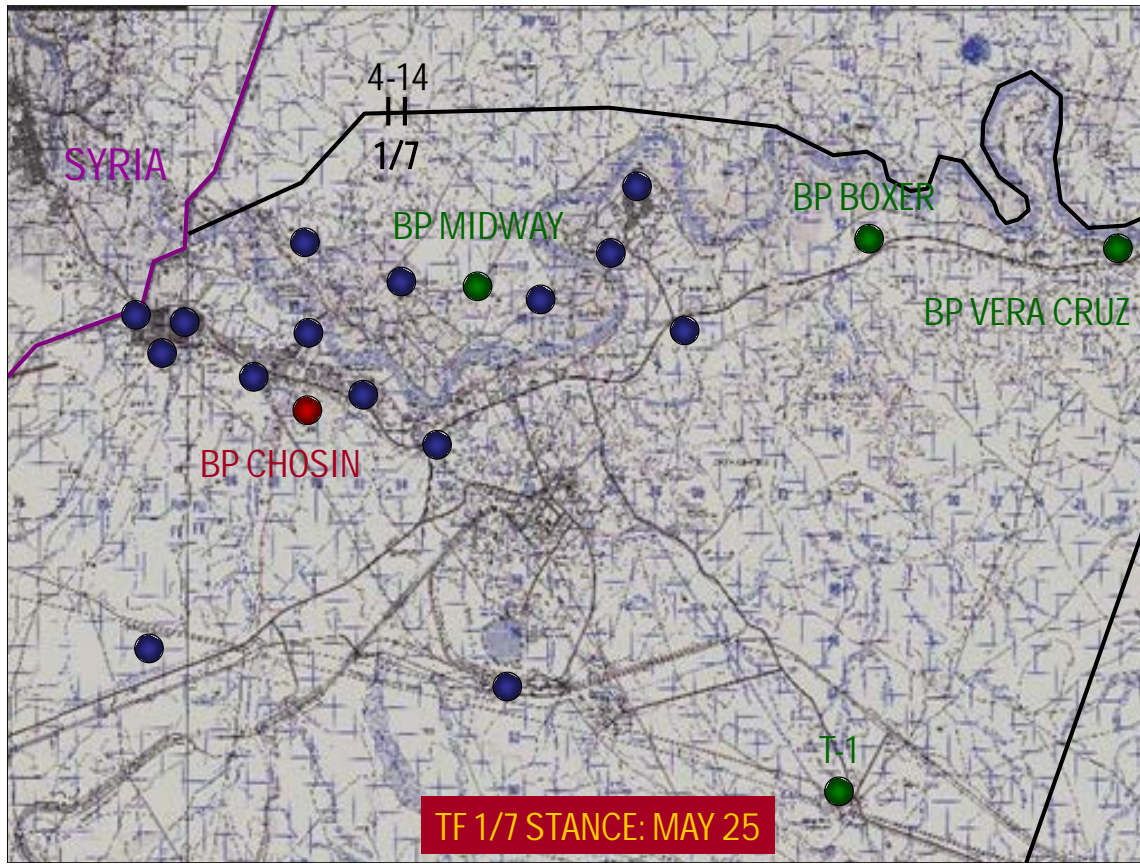


Figure A-32. TF 1/7 Stance, 25 May 2006

So midway through the deployment this is what we looked at. We had taken one of 3/6's battle positions, Chosin. We actually closed it. It was in an area that didn't do us any good, and I needed the combat power in a different area. You can see the additional battle positions that we had established about midway through.

Here [Figure A-33] you can see not only the major roads that ran through the area, but this is what we were trying to do in a graphical way, if I can use the engineer symbols. We were trying to interdict everything coming across the border. We were trying to block anyone who wasn't from the area from coming into the area. And we're not going to block people, but again, just the engineer symbols don't work perfectly, but you kind of get conceptually what we were trying to do here. We were trying to fix in place a lot of the insurgent activity, which had been pushed out into the hinterland as we got more aggressive in the urban areas. The reports on most of the battalion's high value targets were that they had fled to areas like that. They knew our boundaries. They knew where we were. They knew where the Stryker battalion was and they exploited that as they do with just about any operation.



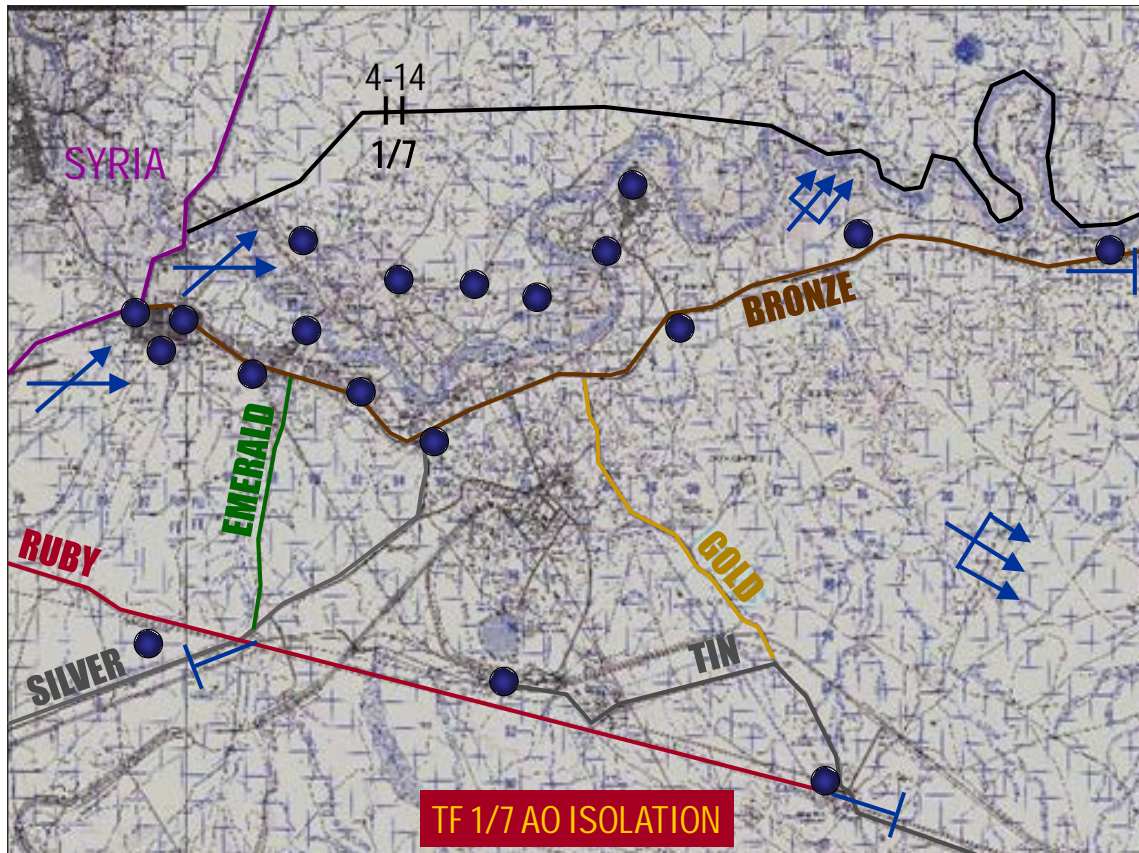


Figure A-33. TF 1/7 Area of Operation Isolation (Note the major road networks)

As we expanded the growth of the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police, you can see in red some of the battle positions towards the end of the battalion deployment. We started in March. This is September of 2006 [Figure A-34]. We turned a number of them over completely to either the Iraqi Police or a combined police and Army facility. Some of them facilitated one or the other, either police or Army. Some of them facilitated both. I thought, just from a personal point of view, I like to keep the Army and the Police together. They tended to cancel out each other's negative attributes. The police are from the local area. They were susceptible not only to local intimidation, because their families live there, but they were also subject to a lot of corruption. The Army on the other hand is not from the local area, so they're less susceptible to local intimidation. So I thought the Police and the Army tended to cancel out each other's negative attributes. But you can see, Beirut, which was a train station in the urban area of Husaybah, we turned it into a major police station. Tinian, which was at a great choke point on the road, was a good place to put the Army. We stood up a combined Iraqi Army and police at Belleau wood. That actually transitioned into the fledging Iraqi Highway Patrol, which

I thought was an important aspect. And then I talked a little bit earlier about the village at T-1, which was probably our most effective police station.

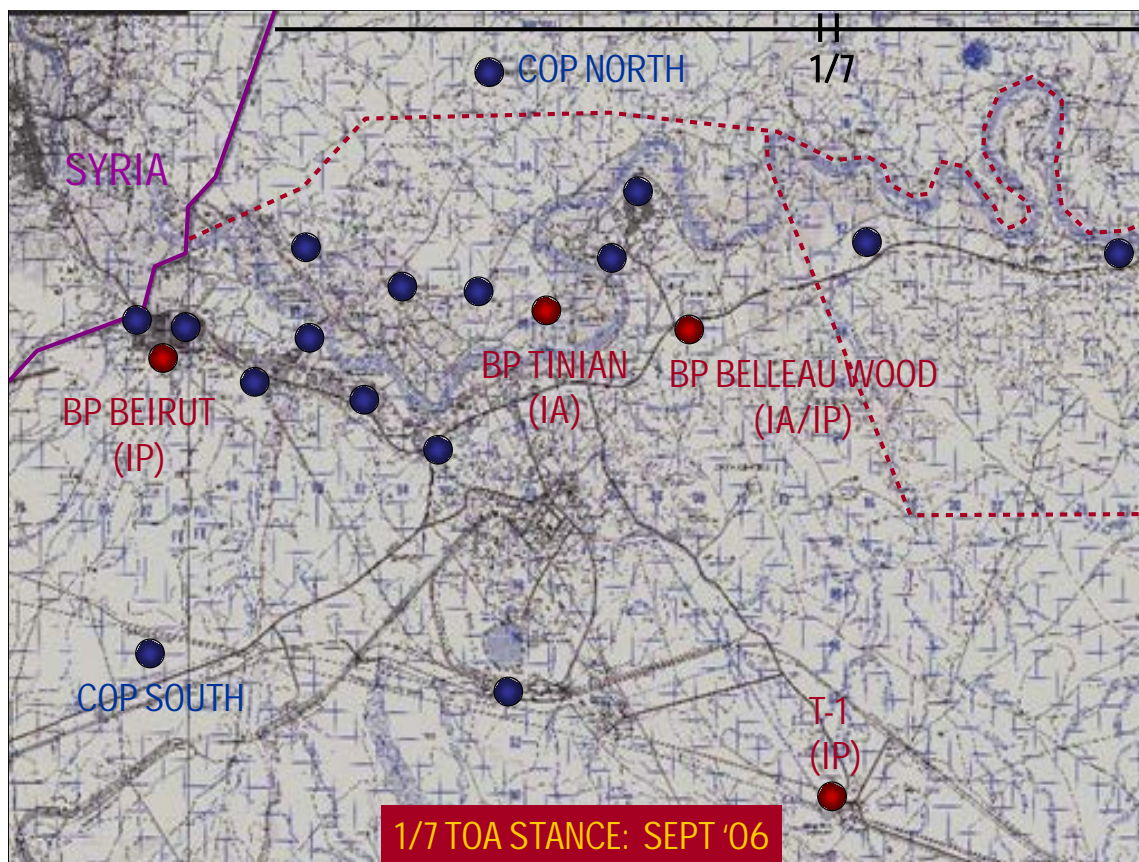


Figure A-34. 1/7 Marines, September 2006

We spent a lot of time talking about distributed ops in our PTP cycle. I spoke a little bit about Company Level Intel Cells. How we organized the battalion: nothing special there...a lot of battalions at a Four Maneuver Company Base. I thought what we were doing at the time that was most important that fed into the concept was we linked it all together with digital C2. Initially, it was UHF, which obviously has a lot of draw backs. We made extensive use of the MDACs. Later we had a great team come out from MCTSSA (Marine Corps Tactical Systems Support Activity) , in fact, and they set up a

SWAN (Support Wide Area Network)<sup>3</sup> network for us. We had great digital C2 throughout the deployment because of that.

Aviation [next topic of discussion]: if you look at where Al Qaim is, because we were kind of on the edge, I talked a little bit about the Stryker Battalion, and how I thought they had good intel assets. We were very lucky, because we had a skid det (helicopter detachment) and a Medevac det that were located at Al Qaim. They didn't work directly for me, but obviously we were able to task them. [1:30:38]

So, as you look forward into task organization of battalions in a counterinsurgency, being able to have intel, aviation, and fires assets at the battalion level—or whatever the level is that you're going to put independent units out—becomes important. If you look throughout Africa where some of the French units are, they have what we would call like battalion level MAGTF [Marine Air Ground Task Force] in various colonial countries. Having four fixed wing aircraft, a helicopter det, and a Reinforced Mechanized Infantry Battalion in a lot of countries in Africa, for example, that makes a huge difference. That's the most potent force in the country. Even in a counterinsurgency, I think it becomes important. We developed a great relationship with the aviation. They were important in shutting down a lot of the indirect fire that we were taking. The RCT Commander, Colonel Crowe, about midway through the deployment, gave us a couple of 155's. They were Charlie Battery 1/10. They were initially down at one of the border POEs. I think they were replaced by a border team, so we had about half the artillery battery that came up. They became important to us, not just as another Provisional Infantry Unit, but we were able to actually shoot a lot of artillery illume type missions. We never shot any combat missions or any HE (High Explosives) missions with them, but it was important to know that if we needed to, we had them.

Engineering is absolutely vital in a counterinsurgency. Again, at the battalion level, you've got to be able to construct your own battle positions. You have to have the engineers and the equipment that you need, so that you don't need to go beg and borrow stuff. If the tactical situation on the ground evolves, you need to be able to exploit it pretty quickly.

We talked earlier about Ralph Morton and the role of the cop on the beat. We instilled that mentality into the Marines and the squad leaders. Ralph brought a couple other

<sup>3</sup> SWAN is a family of satellite systems that provide communications capability to smaller units in the MAGTF.



things with him in addition to that expertise, which we pushed down to every squad. We got a pretty good source of funding, too. It came through the TSWG [Tactical Support Working Group]. They were able to leverage a few million dollars worth of equipment that we were initially going to make experimental use of, but we had a team from Lockheed Martin deploy with us. We were able to employ a lot of surveillance equipment as well as a lot of intel type equipment that we got through TSWG funding.

Jones: TSWG, what's that?

Marano: TSWG, Tactical Support Working Group. That's a SECDEF (Secretary of Defense), OSD (Office of the Secretary of Defense) level... And you can see how we branched out a little bit. Both the battalion 2, Captain Todd Pillow, and the battalion 3 at the time, Major Dutch Deets, spent a lot of time looking at how big city American Police Departments do anti-gang work. We talked about it. A lot of these guys look closer to the Crips and the Bloods than they do Al Qaeda or a true transnational Al Qaeda Cell. So, I thought that was directly applicable. The Phoenix Police Department, again, gave us the CopLink Database. [See figure 7, Project Metro, Support from Lockheed Martin, Phoenix and LA Police Departments]. We got TTPs from all those police departments, and we really pushed it out. We employed a lot of different surveillance cameras and a lot of different types of surveillance. The MEF actually put part of the sensor platoon out on the border with us. Among the MEF sensors, we seeded a lot of the cameras and the other sensors that we were able to get through the Lockheed Martin COIN Program that was funded by the TSWG. And then we were able to monitor all that activity back at the battalion FOB. [1:35:12]

The big area that I was concerned about was the border. It was also the area the General Casey was most concerned about. He came out a couple of times, because he was concerned about that border area. This is actually a view of the border right here. Again, some of the equipment that we employed worked out well. And some of it, I think, we should probably make more use of. I think much of this information has been lost, but there's a lot of stay behind type equipment that I was interested in. For example, you've got good intel that a certain insurgent is in a house. When you do a raid on the house and the insurgent's not there, but you're pretty sure you have the right place, you need to leave some type of equipment behind. So if he does show back up again either it transmits or you can go back and pull it out and do forensics and find out he was there. So I was interested in being able to do things like that. We procured a number of GPS tracking devices that I thought we'd be able to put on at things like vehicle checkpoints—sort

of VCP (Vehicle Checkpoint), if an individual came through that was in our database, we could pop a GPS tracker on the bottom of it. Again, there's a lot of potential. We did a pretty detailed AAR [After Action Report]. I don't think anything ever came from it, but that's the type of sophistication that we need to do. It was organizations like the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] do. They use GPS tracking devices all the time. Again, it's that whole investigative type mentality that we're talking about.

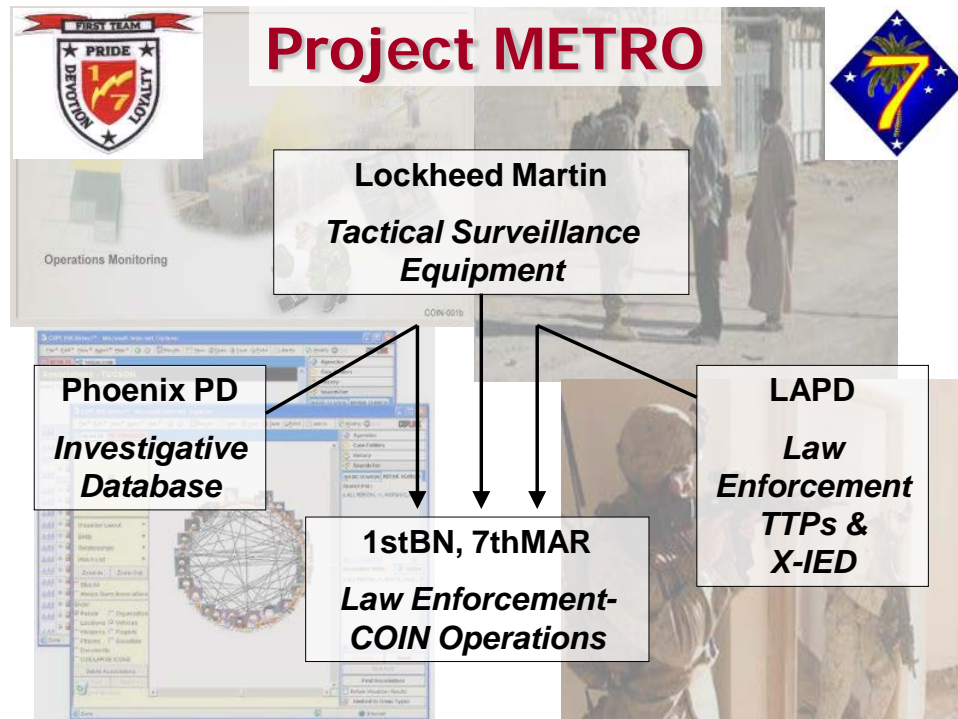


Figure A-35. Project Metro, Support from Other Organizations

Screen shot on CopLink [not included]. This is actually from the Phoenix Police Department. It draws up things like link diagrams and everything else. I think we've probably solved this need now through BATs, but in 2006 I thought that was a pretty innovative answer. I talked a little bit about the squad on the beat. This is the city of Husaybah right here, if you can see that on the screen. We had one company from 1/7 that was out there, Baker Company 1/7. Every urban area was divided in a platoon sector, and they stayed constant. And then the platoon sectors were divided into squad sectors, and the squads and the squad leaders treated that as their beat. And I don't mean in a theoretical sense. That was their area. They identified every electronic shop and every welding shop. They did extensive census patrols. We inputted that information back into our da-

tabase. You can see kind of a mock diagram of what I'm talking about. In this example that we're talking about, we identified all the metal shops where someone in this squad's area could produce a pressure plate IED. Well that squad made a habit of paying a visit on a daily basis with that guy so we know him. And again, just like a cop does, we're not here to whack you at midnight. We're just checking on you.

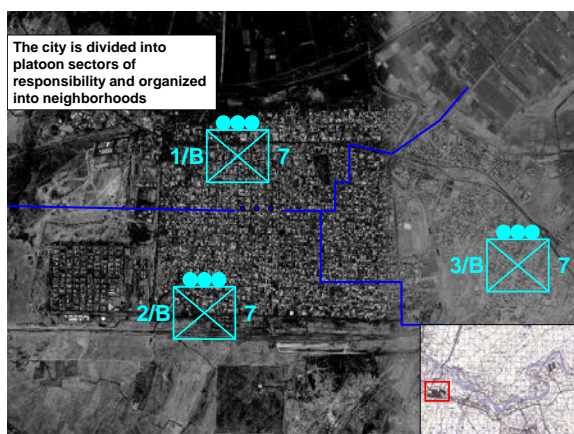


Figure A-36. City Divided in Platoon Sectors

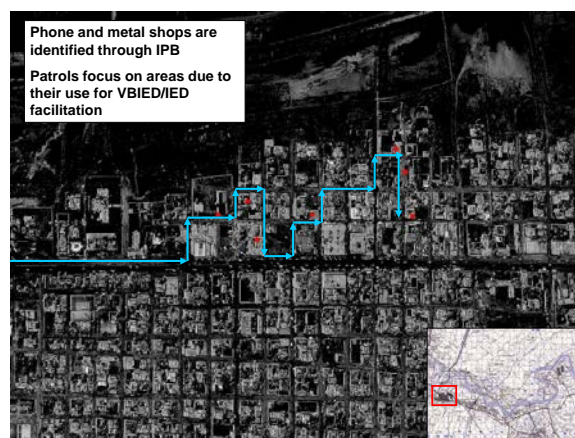


Figure A-37. Potential IED Support Shops Visited

This guy knew that we were watching him and that we knew exactly who he was and what his name was. We knew where he lived. We knew what his vehicle was. Same thing with the guy in the electronic shop, who initially said he didn't have long range cordless phones, but when we offered him money he went out to his car and brought the long range cordless phones in. So I think if you look back on the whole law enforcement mindset, this is the key point, just using proven law enforcement TTPs and developing in your Marines that investigative mentality. If they see something that doesn't look right, then they investigate it. I think a couple things grew directly out of it. The most important aspects of Combat Hunter grew directly out of this. Profiling. You establish a base line. In this case when we're talking about sectors, the squad leader, the platoon commander, you establish your base line for how your area looks normal. Any time you go in the area, if there's anything that's out of the base line, anything, you investigate it. Whatever it is. A vehicle that's parked there that you've never seen, investigate it. Where is it from? What's the license plate? I've never seen that license plate. What kind of license plate is that? I'm going to take a picture of it. I'm going to find out. Who owns this vehicle? Where is he? It's that type of building a base line and then investigating everything out of the base line. The other important aspect that we employed was profiling.

And I mean these are a couple of the key aspects of what was initially called Cop on the Beat but has become Combat Hunter. I think Combat Hunter is a better example of this than what really I think has been a mismanaged Cop on the Beat. It's a bad term. It makes it seem like we're a bunch of guys with a cup of coffee and a donut in our hand. And that is as far from reality as you can make it. [1:41:00]

Okay, so as we progressed throughout the deployment, 4-14, the Stryker Battalion, was withdrawn to Baghdad. We expanded north into 4-14's area. You can see that the average weekly OPTEMPO we were able to generate. Again in 2006, this is pretty high on a weekly basis and you see the number of Iraqi Security Force only patrols that we were pushing. And we were pushing these guys out there by themselves, doing patrols. See the combined patrols [Figure A-38], but these are the Iraqis themselves doing patrols [right bar of Figure A-38].

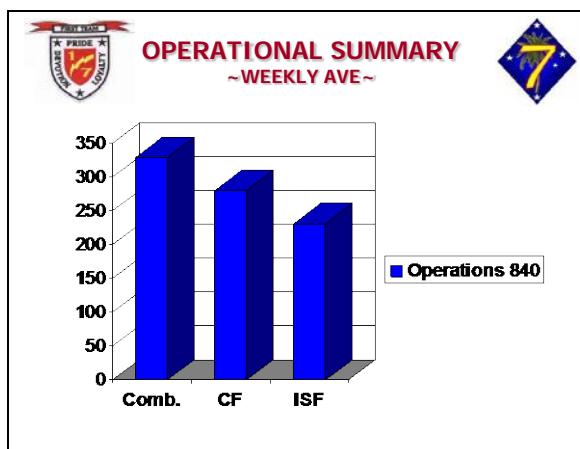


Figure A-38. OPTEMPO Weekly Average, Based on Number of Operations in 2006

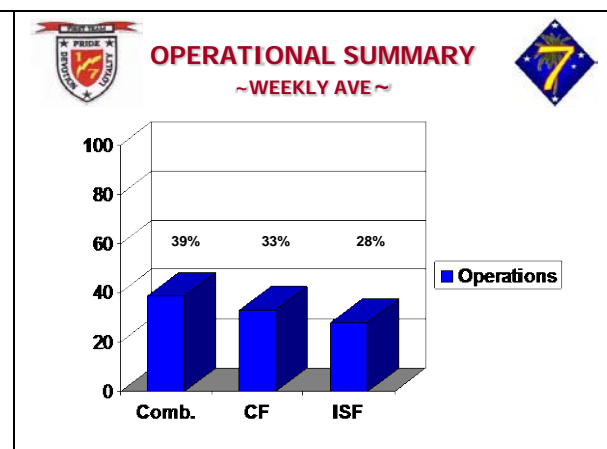


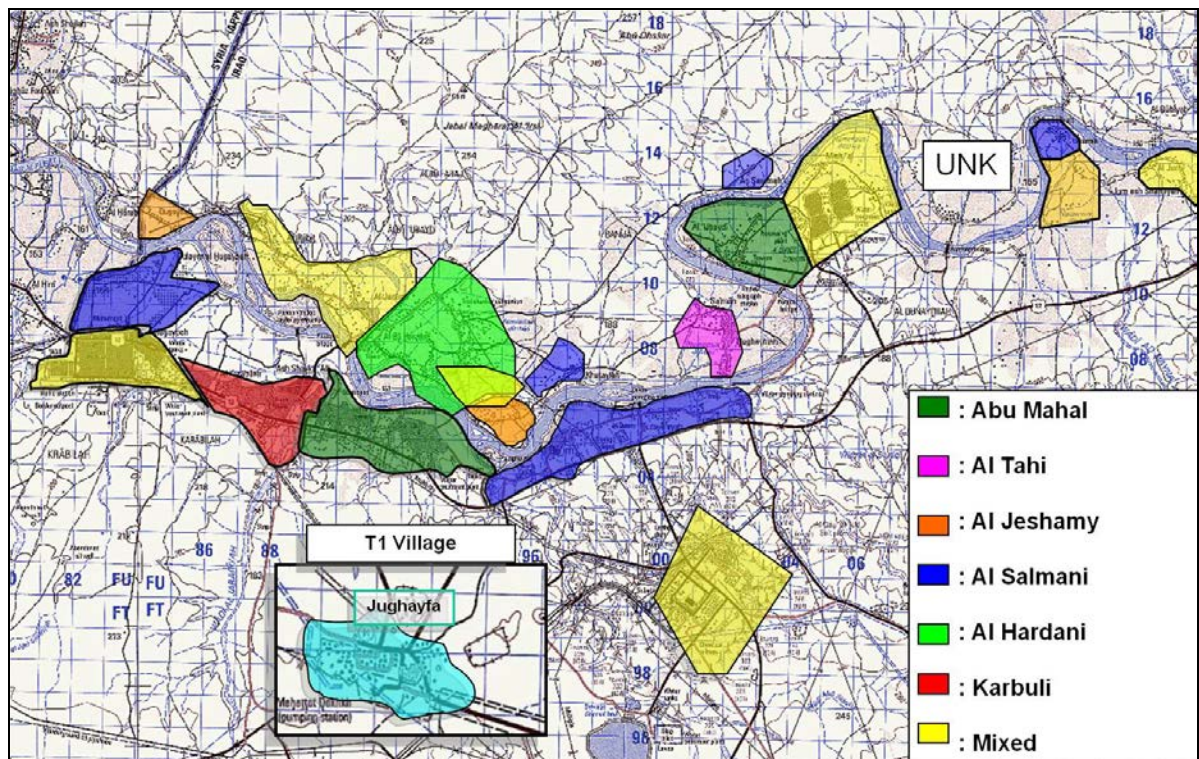
Figure A-39. OPTEMPO, Percentage of Operations Performed by CF, ISF and Combined

Jones: So the index on the left represents patrols that you executed.

Marano: That were combined [Iraqi and Coalition]. These are not all cumulative. These are all separate. So there is a total of 840 on an average weekly basis. That number is combined [Iraqi and Coalition], Coalition and Iraqi. You can see US Marine [CF] only, and you can see Iraqi only. So we were able to generate a pretty high number of Iraqi only patrol and activities on a weekly basis. I think that's key, especially as the police get more capability. You can see the percentage [Figure A-39]. That's that same slide only expresses the percentage. So again, I mean almost 1/3, 1/3, 1/3, not quite, but close.



Intel, we talked a little bit earlier about the battalion intel organization. We didn't call it Company Intel Cells then, but that's exactly what it was. You can see on the shading, and hopefully it shows that on the camera. Hopefully the color shows up. You can see the tribal breakdown [Figure A-40].



**Figure A-40. Major Tribes of the Al Qaim District**

Obviously it's a little bit more complex than this slide might lead you to believe, because in any area there are mixed tribal areas. But you can see the basic tribal layout. Some of the major ones are the Albu-Mahal, the Salamanis, and the Karbulis. Initially when we got there, the Albu-Mahal had traditionally been the strongest tribe in the area. The Karbulis had facilitated the introduction of the islamists into the area. The Albu-Mahal had fled southwest, mainly down to Akashat. They formed the nucleus of the Desert Protectors down there. So, after STEEL CURTAIN, there was a lot of tribal retribution that was going on. That violence eventually settled down. However, you can see how the tribes were mixed up in the major population areas. As we go farther east, again, this is the Syrian Border, Husaybah, and Ubaydi. So now my next slide [not included here] we're going to go towards Ubaydi and farther west. You can see the breakdown of the tribes in



this area that I talked about from Ubaydi east that we expanded into. And again, you can see how they're kind of mixed. The Civil Affairs and Intel Marines had to have a high degree of sophistication when they dealt with them, because each one of them had different agendas and different requirements and things like that.

The city of Hussaybah itself had a prewar population of about 150,000. We estimated it was anywhere around 100,000 when we were there. You can see how that itself was mixed in terms of tribes [Figure A-41]. It didn't really facilitate any type of a unified approach. Being the major city, it made it a lot more difficult that it was a very mixed tribal area. Many of them were far more mixed than this slide appears. If you're in an area where you know most of the people are in one tribe, you can really tailor your approach to that. In a big city where you've got even within the city, it's all mixed up, it was always very hard to come up with the right approach. Again, you can see Camp Gannon. That was Baker 1/7 and the Syrian Border. [1:45:49]

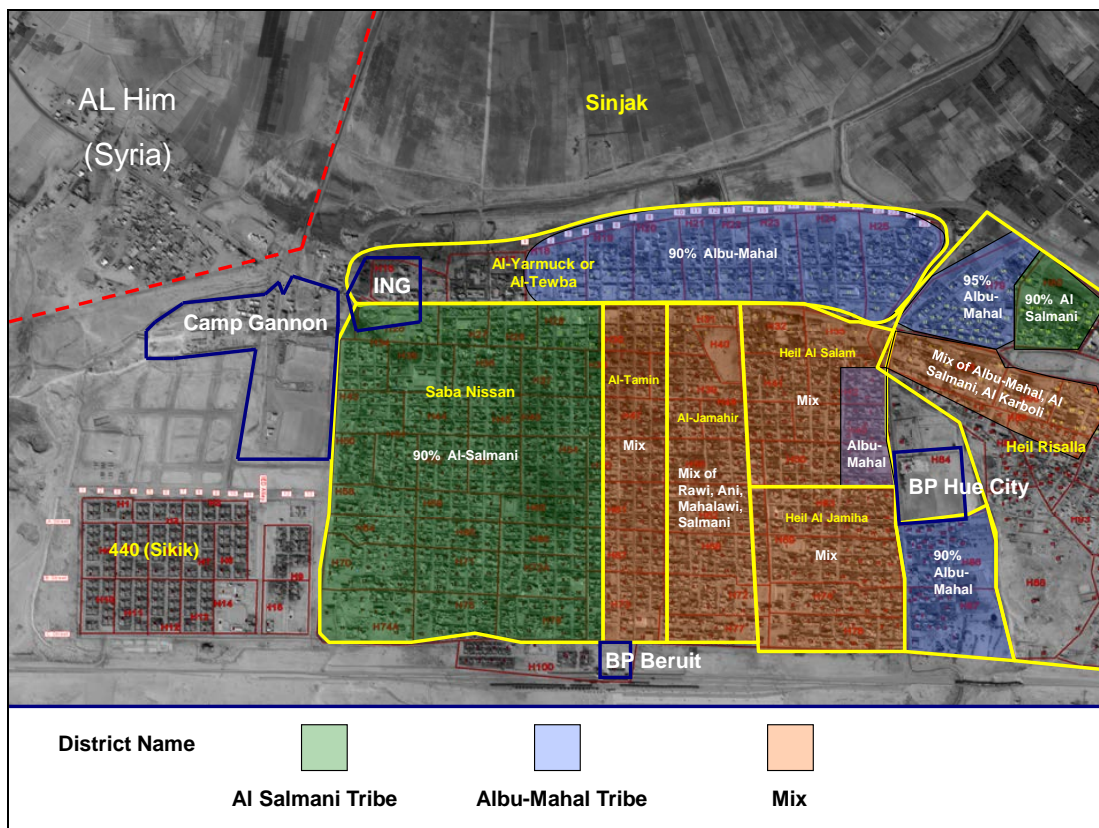


Figure A-41. Tribal Areas in Husaybah

I talked a little bit about trying to find some metrics, like how are we doing? Are we winning? Are we being effective? And I thought as you looked at this particular slide it told a pretty good story [Figure A-42]. The green are just cache finds. This right here is when 1/7 RIP'd with 3/6 [March 2006]. So, post STEEL CURTAIN 3/6 was finding a lot of caches [STEEL CURTAIN was in November 2005]. They tended to decrease over time. What I think are most important are the bottom; the light blue and the dark blue. You can see the percentages of IED finds, the darker blue is the IED strike. The lighter blue is the IED finds. In my assessment, I think that is one of the better indicators of how well you're doing in terms of intel gathering and finding these IEDs before they find you.

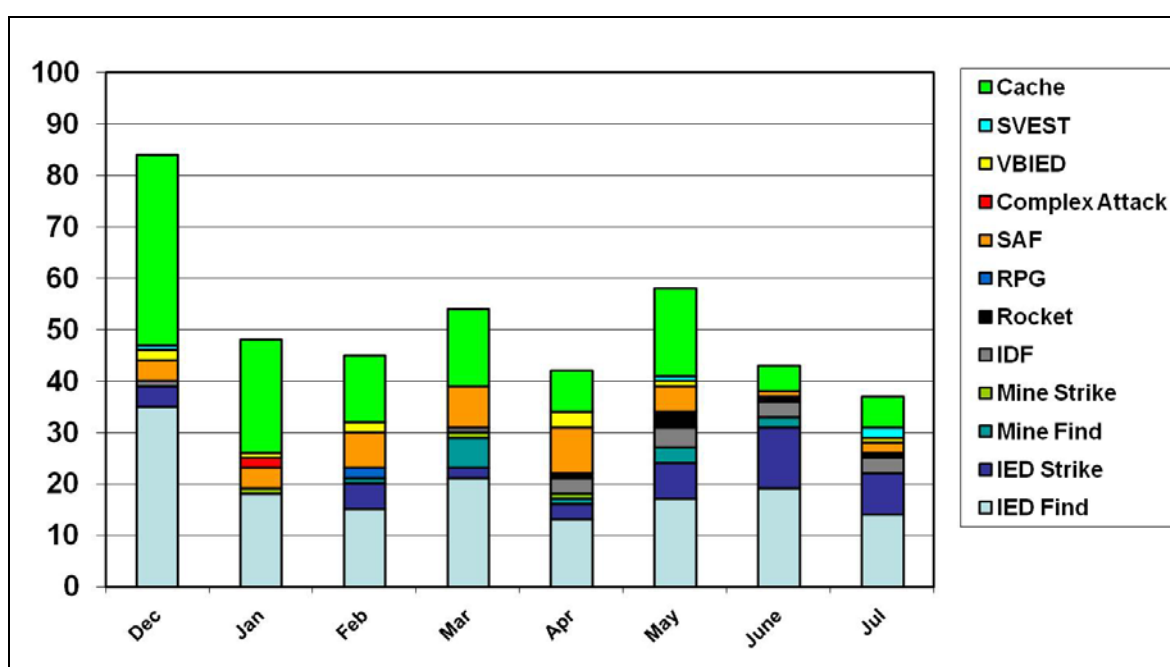


Figure A-42. Incidents

As we expanded into some of the sanctuary areas, so to speak, that percentage got closer to what the MEF average was, which was about 50/50. You can see how June, which was one of the more kinetic months, was getting a little closer to the MEF percentage.

The overwhelming percentage of the type of IEDs fit in the two categories: Command and pressure plate [Figure A-43]. The command detonated—that's either going to be your long range cordless phone, which was the device of choice or, to a less extent, command wire, the key fob, and that type of stuff. Now looking back to the law enforcement mentality and those type of operations that focused your intel gathering, you

think about where can they get the cordless phones? Where can they make the pressure plates? Focus on that, and then radiate out. All those shop owners and welders know. So, I think that story tells an important one. I think as you look at the number of incomplete, that was the highest single percentage of IEDs were incomplete. And that fed right into, I think, the intel reporting and the nature of how they actually built IEDs.

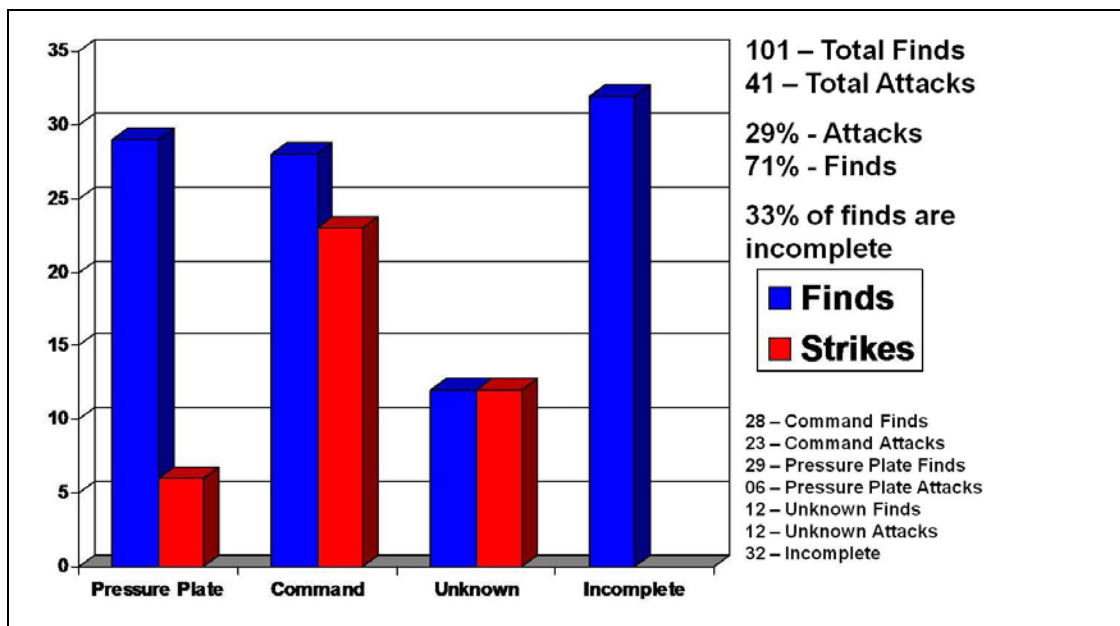


Figure A-43. IED Analysis 16 March–5 September 2006

Jones: So the CopLink gave you a chance to do that link analysis that you could spread your tentacles out? [1:48:38]

Marano: It did. When you combine the welder with the link analysis that CopLink did, the welder may not be the one you're looking for, but when you link out from him, you'll very often find the person you're looking for in his family. So the CopLink and link analysis directly feeds into those IED finds and then taking those cells down. I just want to talk about what we called our circle of trust [Figure A-44]. We spoke about some of these people in here. Sheikh Sabah, who I think you said you spoke to. I don't know if he's still in Jordan, sir?

Jones: Bill Knarr talked to him yesterday; yes.

Marano: He's in Jordan, ok. Mayor Farhan, he actually came to the U.S. I hope to see him again. The city of Laguna Niguel is actually his sister city.

Jones: The city of Laguna Niguel?

Marano: Right. If there are two places on the planet earth more different than Al Qaim and Laguna Niguel, I'm not aware of it! Now, Brigadier General Ismael. At the time and for an Iraqi Brigade Commander, he was pretty honest and pretty effective. I mean, from a relative point of view. He was actually related to the Division Commander, 7<sup>th</sup> Division, General Murthy, who was related to Sheikh Kurdi. And it was interesting, Sheikh Kurdi lived in Ubaydi. General Murthy would come at least once a month. He worked in Al Asad. He would fly up on a helo. I'd pick him up. He'd fly into Al Qaim into my battalion FOB. I would drive him out to Ubaydi. We'd have a huge dinner. There were a couple times when I stayed over night. But it was interesting to see where he sat and where Sheikh Kurdi sat. Sheikh Kurdi was the top dog. And the way that they sit, it wasn't General Murthy, it was Sheikh Kurdi. So, my assessment that I passed on was clearly that Sheikh Sabah was in effect running the 7<sup>th</sup> ID. I think that's a pretty accurate way to look at it.

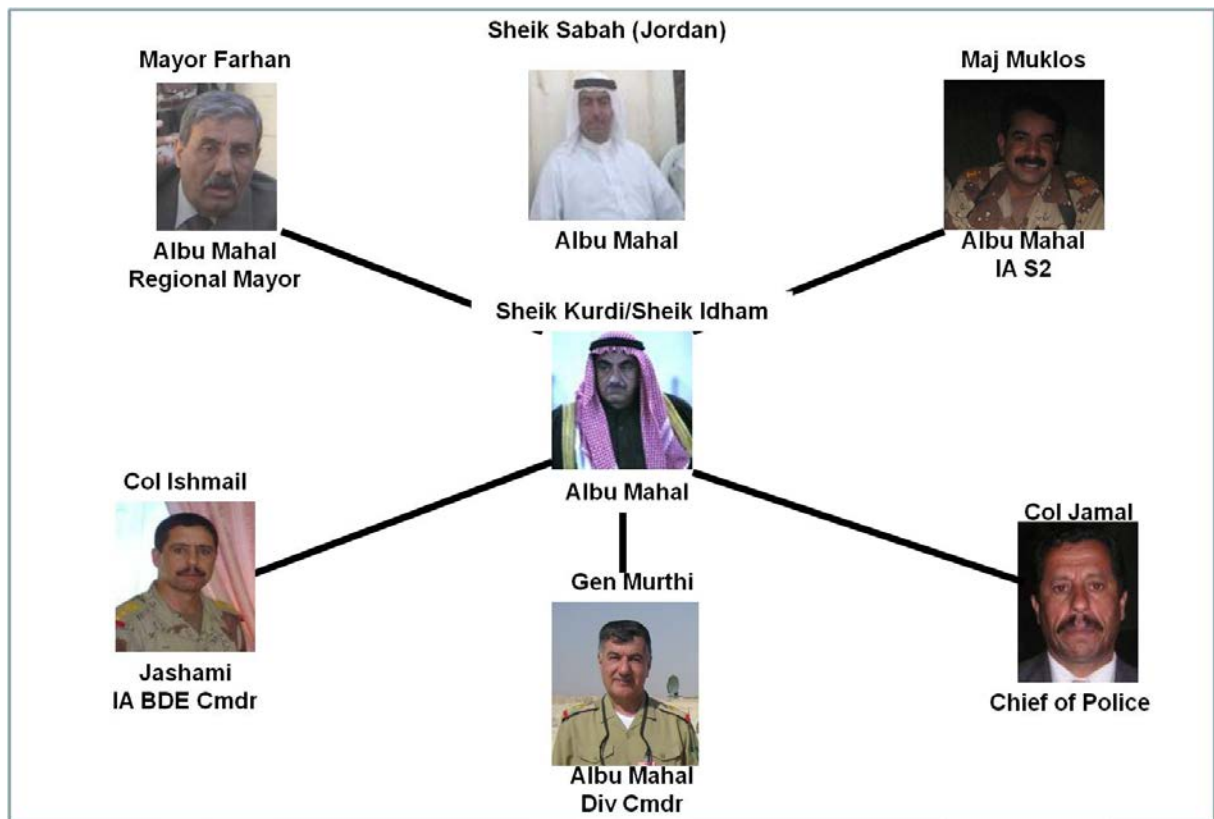


Figure A-44. 1/7 Marines Circle of Trust, Al Qaim, 2006

I talked about some of the assistance of both Mayor Farhan and Colonel Ismael [Ishmail in photo, Figure A-44] that we worked very hard for intel. Major Muklis [Muklos in photo, Figure A-44] turned out to be a pretty good source for us. The Iraqis do a pretty good job with HUMINT. If you can get into their network and get information from them, it's pretty effective. Colonel Jamal and Colonel Ismael were brothers. He was who we put in as a Chief of Police. I spoke a little bit about a lot of the horse trading that we had to go through to come up with a tribally accepted structure for the police. It was never perfect. We had frequent blue on blue fire fights between the police and the Army. We actually had to get in the middle of it and stop it. But Colonel Jamal was a pretty effective police chief. Again, I spoke a little bit about it. You can see the family relationship here and how Sheikh Kurdi was really in Iraq. He was the key guy. He was a cousin of Sheikh Sabah, who was the big guy. But certainly in Iraq, Kurdi was running the operation so to speak. Farhan was related by marriage, so he was acceptable to the other tribes. Again, he was a former Iraqi Army Brigadier (General), so he was a pragmatist.

Jones: He was the one you mentioned who was not an Albu-Mahal, only by marriage.

Marano: Only by marriage. So he was acceptable to the other tribes among other reasons but I think for that reason. He was a former Ba'athist, but... you know...

Jones: Former Brigadier General?

Marano: Former Brigadier [General]. So he was a pragmatist. He wasn't ideological. What I think is important on this slide is the percentage [Figure A-45]. The red is how many of them were actually sent to higher headquarters and incarcerated for a long period of time. Again, as I look back on how well we were doing and how effective our intel was, I think

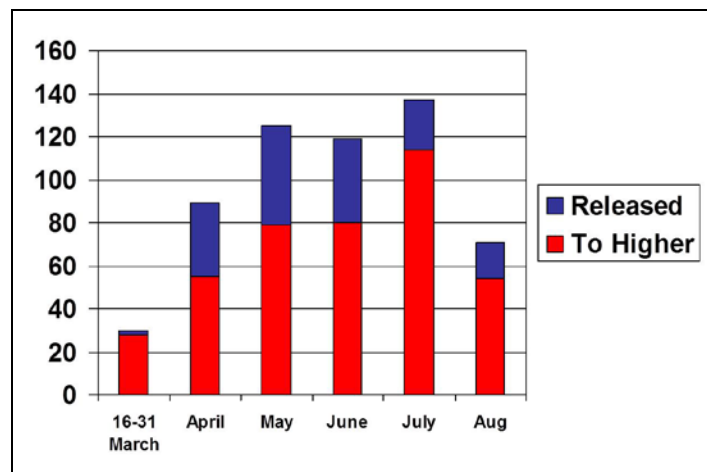


Figure A-45. Detainees

the IED finds is one piece of empirical data. I think the number of detainees that we kept and had the goods on [was an indicator, too.] I think the combination of the company level



intel and the investigative mindset among the squad leaders is another good indicator of how well that's working. [1:53:25]

I talked a little bit about the Iraqi Army and the police. We had the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division that was partnered with us at the train station in Al Qaim. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's CP was with us at Al Qaim. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was north of the river in the area that the Iraqis called Ramana [Figure A-46]. They were partnered with my Weapons Company. We split up the other battalion that was partnered with Alpha Company at Ubaydi. Charlie Company covered down on what was the most difficult tribe to begin with, the Karbulis. That company commander did a great job. I mean, truly innovative work in flipping that tribe. Again the Albu-Mahal had already flipped. These were the guys that had facilitated the islamists, the foreign fighters, so flipping them was a priority.

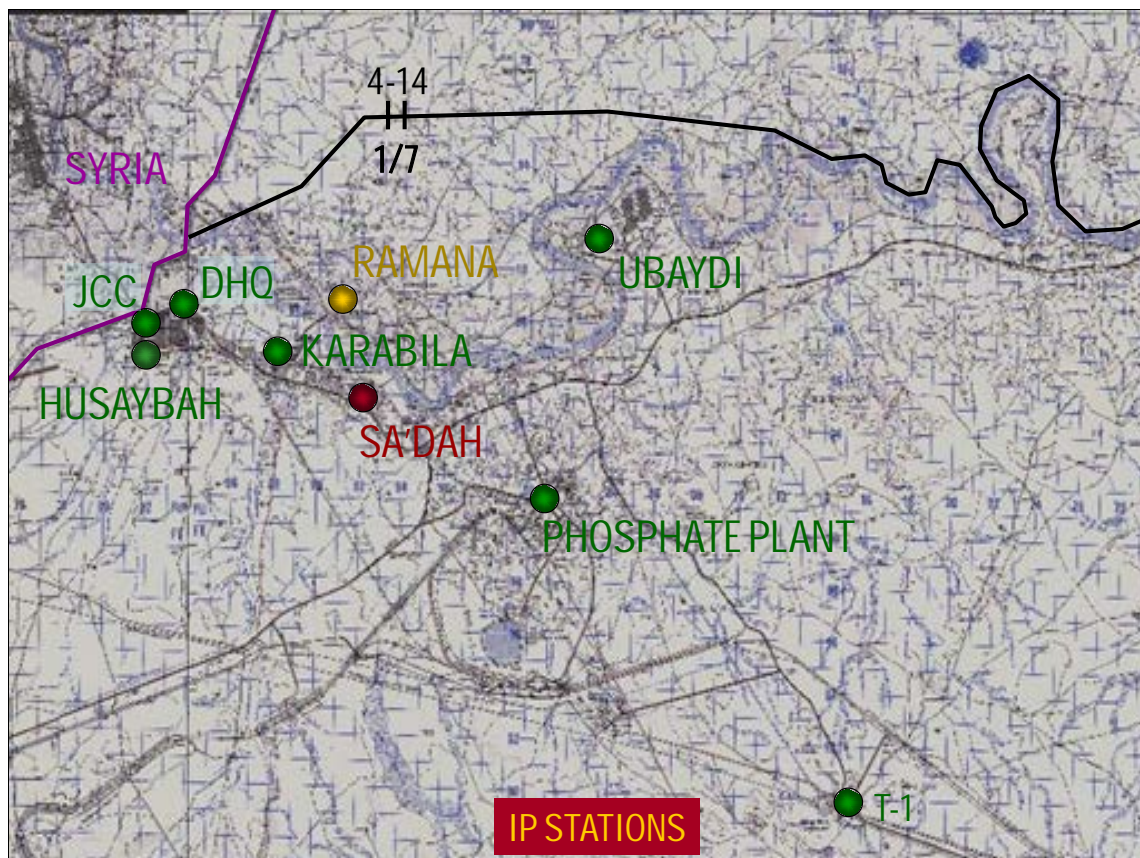


Figure A-46. Iraqi Police Stations

Jones: It had a lot to do with sheep.

Marano: It had a lot to do with sheep, sir, but understanding how that whole process worked. And then finally Camp Gannon, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was located out there. We had COP South, which we really didn't use for much. That was really an economy of force operation down there. There was no population down there, so there's really no reason to put a whole lot of forces there, but it was a huge COP that had been built and we had to at least occupy it. We never solved this while I was there. And you can see how the brigade over time degraded [Figure A-47].

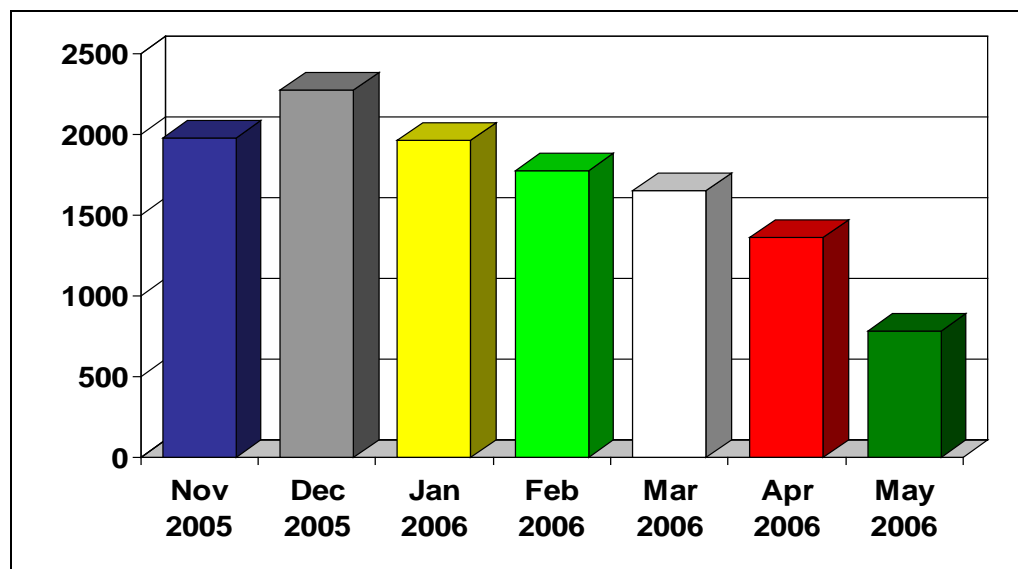


Figure A-47. 3rd Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division Personnel Strength

This is about when they were formed [November 2005]. So they first show up, and they had pretty good personnel strength. 2,274 average daily. By the time we left, that number was down to 781 [September 2006]. This is mainly a pay problem, and it bedeviled me how we let this continue to be a problem. It was pay! We weren't paying them, so they aren't coming to work. They went home on leave, and they didn't show back up. I never understood why we could not solve that pay problem. But you can see how few soldiers we had in place. So, we put a lot of our focus on the police. Most of the population, once they saw the police on the street, wanted to go in the Iraqi Police and not the Army. Every time we did police recruiting drives, we had a lot of people show up. When we did the Army, none of them wanted to go into the Army. They saw that as a Sadr and Shia dominated organization. They liked the police, and they liked the fact that the police were all local. So, the police were really my main effort. And you can see all the different Iraqi

Police stations we established. They provide great intel, so as you look at that whole oil spot concept, the intel, the locals, I think that's a critical aspect of spreading that.

Finally, I spoke a little bit about the border area. As you look at the Al Qaim region it was a merchant group of people. The border had been closed for almost two years. It had been destroyed largely. All the structures that you need to have a port of entry had been destroyed through a number of different ways, both suicide bombings and just daily fighting. So, getting that border open was important. But equally as important was sealing it so that the only place it would be open would in fact be the legitimate border crossing. We spent a lot of engineering effort. We got a lot of support from higher headquarters to establish this [Figure A-48]. You're at Camp Gannon looking north. This is that escarpment [Figure A-49]. This is literally the border as it ran north to south. 3/6 started building fencing. We extended it all the way up to the escarpment. We built berms. We extended it south. You can see how, you know, you build a berm and the fencing all the way up to the border. And then that provided at least some standoff. I wanted to put permanent, persistent surveillance along the border as well. So you could see how in the green, yellow, and red, these were the border obstacles that we constructed. So, it was a pretty big area. It really forced the smugglers to go far outside of those areas in order to smuggle, which they did. But then they still had to come into the urban areas. So with a pretty good IPB, it doesn't show up on this map, but a lot of the routes that they would use if they were going to bypass our obstacles, they had to get through that escarpment, so we were able to target them. We were actually pretty effective in doing interdiction in a few of the areas there.

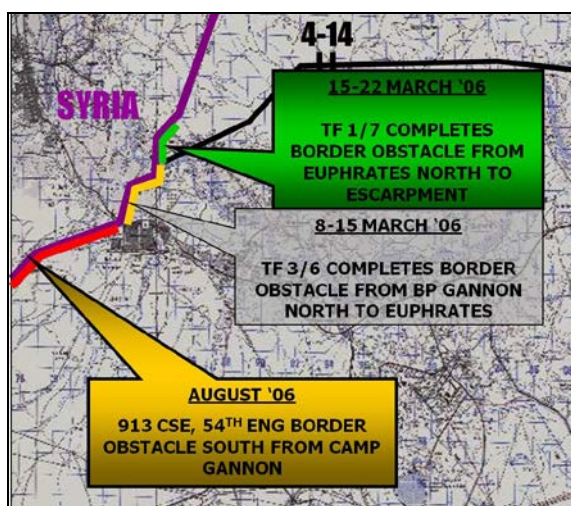


Figure A-48. Border Obstacle Improvement



Figure A-49. Border from Euphrates North to Escarpment



Last thing are the bridges [Figure A-50]. Again, as you look north and south, the river kind of runs through the center of the AO. It was important from an economic and development point of view to get the bridges rebuilt. They had been destroyed in STEEL CURTAIN and everyone north of the river was paying a premium, up to seven times the price for a liter of fuel or a kilo of flour. So it was important. I actually took General Zilmer down to a couple of the crossings where there was this whole crazy water taxi system set up. I showed him, and he got to talk to some of the people. He saw how important it was in terms of development to reopen these bridges. You can see the results of it. We were able to put a new bridge in place. This was a huge event. You're looking on the south side, looking to the north side. The day we opened this bridge, I let Mayor Farhan cut the ribbon on it. You can see all the Iraqis that had come out. They had the biggest party for us north of the river. And believe it or not, at that point, everyone north of the river called me Lawrence. Just because we got a stupid bridge built. But, it was the type of activity that was important for them. It cemented the fact that the war's over, we're rebuilding, and we're in a new phase.



Figure A-50. Top left, Golden Gate and Memphis Bridge Locations. Top right and bottom left, Golden Gate Bridge damage. Bottom right, Golden Gate Bridge Repair

Jones: When did this take place, Nick, in your deployment?

Marano: This was June, I believe, sir. So again, this is Mayor Farhan. He was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Commander. He was the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Commander. You can see a lot of the police and all the sheikhs from the north end of the river. We all walked together across the bridge. It was pretty cool. Then if you're interested, sir, we can go through the battle positions.

Jones: Yes, please.

Marano: Camp Gannon [Figure A-51] on the border, kind of good overview, Company sized position. Beirut, I ended up turning this into a complete police station. It was a train station. Hue City, [Figure A-52] this is where we also had our CMOC (Civil-Military Operations Center). BP Tarawa, this is where Charlie Company 1/7 was. You can see how the Marines just walk right out, and they're in the city. Guadalcanal was getting a lot of IED attacks on a couple of different roads, so we put positions in just to secure the roads so we didn't get IED'd. I'm just going to run through these if we don't have a lot of time. Chapultepec, this was another company sized position that was Alpha Company 1/7. Belleau Wood, we built structures there and that became Iraqi Police and eventually the Iraqi Highway Patrol was there. We ended up putting buildings up there along the road. Tripoli. Boxer, again this was a squad position. We were getting IED attacked as we were running out to that expanded area, so I had to put something there just for observation and to control the road and cut down on the number of attacks. Vera Cruz, we put it up just above the biggest village that was in the area. If you remember from the engineer graphics, we were trying to block and make this like the largest gated community in Iraq. AP Guam, Tinian, Midway...

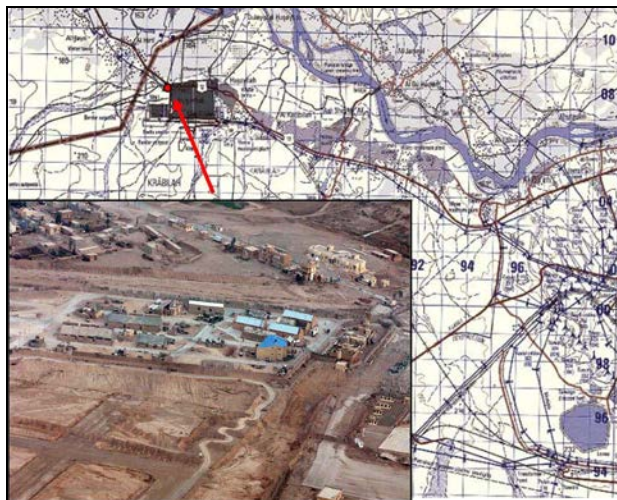


Figure A-51. Camp Gannon

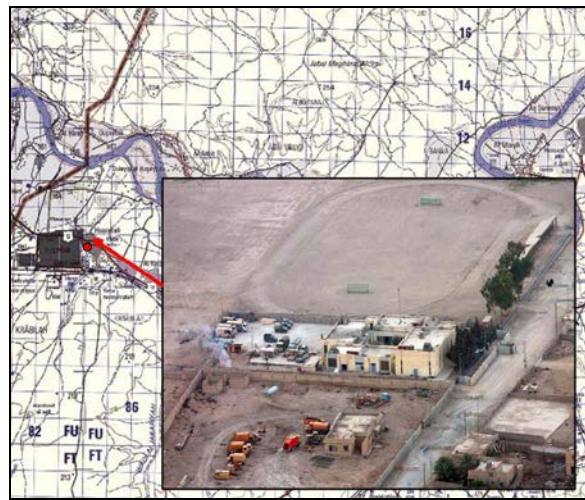


Figure A-52. Hue City

## **Appendix B: Iraqi Perspectives**

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19 May 2010

Subject: Interview with Sheikh Sabah al-Sattam Effan Fahren al-Shurji al-Aziz, principal Sheikh of the Albu-Mahal tribe in Al Qaim

Sheikh Sabah al-Sattam Effan Fahren al-Shurji al-Aziz is the principal sheikh of the Albu-Mahal tribe in Al Qaim, on the border with Syria. Although referred to as a city, Al Qaim is really a district that runs from Husaybah—the city center of Al Qaim—to Anah.



He and his tribe led some of the earliest Iraqi resistance against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), in 2005, which some cite as the first organized “awakening” effort. However, he doesn’t like to refer to the Albu-Mahal’s revolt against AQI as an “Awakening,” because he thinks they were already awake.

Among the United States’ primary mistakes, he cites Deba’athification and not securing the borders. Additionally, it took the Coalition 2–3 years to begin to understand Iraqi culture. These mistakes led to the creation of the resistance. The Hamza Battalion was initially designed to fight the Coalition but then used to fight AQI. Some tribes helped AQI against the Albu-Mahal.

The conflict with AQ started in 2004 when AQ assassinated Sabah’s relative who was the chief of police.<sup>1</sup> The Albu-Mahals forced AQ out, but AQ continued to rule surrounding areas and killed any Albu-Mahals in those areas.

He left Iraq on 21 August 2005 because of Al Qaeda. Many others also fled because of Al Qaeda’s brutality. He said that there are groups of Albu-Mahals living in both Ramadi and Sofia. This confirms tribal linkages to those areas and that tribal members could have fled to those areas. By late August 2005, Al Qaeda was in control of Al Qaim and placed a sign, “Islamic Republic of Islam,” along the road in the Wadi Ijbah east of Husaybah.<sup>2</sup>

In late August 2005, the Minister of Defense Sa’dun Dulaymi authorized organizing 280 armed men called Desert Force Protection [Desert Protectors]. In October 2005, there was a major conflict between the Coalition assisted by the Desert Force Protection and AQ where

<sup>1</sup> Based on other accounts, this occurred in May 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Not at the entrance to Husaybah city.

AQ was forced out of the area. The Albu-Mahals then formed the police, army, and a judiciary system.

Sheikh Sattar Albu-Risha came to visit Sabah in Jordan, and they talked about the Mahal's revolt and Sattar's desire to lead a revolt in Ramadi. Later, Sattar led the Sahawa against Al Qaeda in the Ramadi area.<sup>3</sup> But what made Al Qaim's fight against AQ more difficult than the fights in Al Qaim and Ramadi was that "the Mahals had an actual war against AQ, Ramadi didn't...there was no face-to-face conflict. Additionally, the United States helped Ramadi, but not in Al Qaim."<sup>4</sup>

When asked about the current status of Al Qaim, Sabah indicated that besides high unemployment and few working services, the biggest problem in Al Qaim is suicide bombers.

Sheikh Sabah was interviewed at the Hyatt Hotel in Amman, Jordan by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr, LtCol David Graves, USMC, and Ms. Mary Hawkins, on 3 February 2011. Mr. Munther Saiegh translated. Major Peter Tabash from the American Embassy was present.

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Knarr: Sir, could you start by talking about your background and Al Qaim and your tribe?

Sabah: In the name of God the most merciful, my name is Sheikh Sabah Sattam al-Shurji, the head of the tribe of Albu-Mahal. In fact, many tribes come from Al Qaim. The main tribe in Qaim and the largest tribe is the Albu-Mahal. We have a good relationship with all the tribes. Before the war, the situation was much easier. There were no terrorists, no killings. There was nothing like that there before.

I lived in Al Qaim in the Ubaydi District. This is where I was born. My primary and secondary schooling was in Al Qaim. And the last year I studied at Baghdad College in Baghdad. I did not continue my education after college. My father passed away at the end of 1992, and I inherited tribal responsibilities from my father. I was the youngest sheikh in Anbar.

As I said earlier, we had a good relationship with all the tribes in Anbar and the whole of Iraq. The situation was much easier before the war. It got complicated after Al Qaeda and the terrorists entered our country. The situation started to get worse, especially the

<sup>3</sup> Sabah was not claiming credit for this, he was just responding to a the question about whether he had met and talked with Sattar about the Albu Mahal's success against Al Qaeda in Al Qaim before the Awakening in the Ramadi area. The team saw this connection between the two during its research and wanted to confirm it with Sabah.

<sup>4</sup> We know this is not accurate.



relationships amongst the tribes. In 2003, when the invaders entered Iraq, the British Army entered through Western Iraq. I think they remained there for two or three months and then they handed it over to the American Army. At this stage, the difficulties started. It was a difficult time. The British and the Americans didn't understand the Iraqi culture, so they started making mistakes. The first mistake they made was asking if we were Shia or Sunnis.

Then they began a relationship with certain people [that could not be trusted]. The Americans and British believed anybody who spoke to them, so they made plenty of mistakes. A lot of innocent people were killed, and many more were arrested.

After two or three years, they [the Americans] started to understand the situation—it started to become clear to them. We and most of all the sheikhs started to realize that we had a new Iraq and were being invaded by foreign countries. In general, the Americans treated Iraqis in very difficult ways [badly] and they made a lot of mistakes. [8:53] They didn't speak to the right people in many different areas in Iraq, and this affected the whole of the Iraqi nation. As I said earlier, plenty of innocent civilians were killed because of that. And as you know, in any country that is invaded, a resistance will start. I don't think there's any nation that does not resist an invader. A nationalist, patriotic, Iraqi resistance started, and plenty of the Americans respected that there was an Iraqi resistance. Many generals spoke to me about how they respected that there was some type of Iraqi resistance.

The second American mistake was a bigger mistake. It was dissolving the Iraqi Army, institutions, and ministries. This was a big mistake that has been largely paid for by the Americans and the Iraqis.

The third mistake is that the Americans left the borders open. This was the biggest mistake. So, terrorists entered our country from all the neighboring countries—the Iraqis are still suffering from this.

I'm going to speak about Al Qaeda and the terrorists that operated in my area. As you know, Al Qaeda entered Al Qaim. We border Syria, so they [AQ] started killing Iraqis. We did not like what they did to innocent people. We told the Americans that people were infiltrating our country through the borders—that they were bringing weapons and money, but the Americans didn't listen to us. They were listening to their own information. Al Qaeda controlled the area and hundreds of terrorists entered. They became the second largest force after the American Army. They started implementing their terms

to the Iraqi people. They started killing innocent people—those who they thought were not from the area, for example. Like the Shia. They said, “Oh they’re not Anbaris,” and they killed them. They began to act only on their own interests. In 2004, they assassinated a member of my family. He was the Chief of Police for Qaim. And then the problem started between us [the Albu-Mahal] and them. We didn’t have a lot of weapons to fight them, because as you know, the American Army took all our weapons and arrested hundreds of our people. So, the conflict started between us and Al Qaeda.

We managed to get them out of central Al Qaim, but they controlled all the surrounding areas. They started killing anybody from the Albu-Mahal tribe, and some of the tribes started to become friendly with Al Qaeda. After that, in 2005, the situation became worse, and we couldn’t stand seeing the situation getting worse and worse. The Minister of Defense at the time was Sa’dun Dulaymi. I phoned him and through him, we managed to gather an armed force of 280 men. These were all from my tribe. The [Iraqi] government called it the Desert Force Protection. They brought some of the armed men from outside Al Qaim, and we began fighting Al Qaeda.

One of the first battles or conflicts started on 21 August 2005. This was a hard time for our tribe. Some of the tribes had supported us against Al Qaeda. We called this force, which was from my tribe, the Al Hamza Battalion. At the time, we managed to change it from a tribal force into a government institution. They were the elite Anbari Force at the time. We fought a big battle with Al Qaeda in October 2005. Luckily, thanks to God, we managed to get them out of our area, where they remain until this moment. Albu-Mahal was the first tribe to fight Al Qaeda in Iraq, and we formed the government in Al Qaim a year before one was formed in Ramadi.

We did not call it the Awakening though, because I objected to it being called the Awakening. [18:03] In Arabic, *sahawa* means awakening after you have been asleep, but we never slept. We were awake all the time. And thank God, we managed to form a police force, an army, and a judiciary system. We managed to continue our work and spread it through the province. A year later, the Awakening started in Ramadi. The difference between us and Ramadi was that we had a real war against Al Qaeda that sometimes lasted for a few days. It was different in Ramadi. They didn’t have face to face battles. They were an insurgency killing and assassinating people. The Americans helped more in Ramadi than they helped in Al Qaim. And strategically, Al Qaim is in a different position than Ramadi because we are on the border with Syria. This is a summarized history of the Albu-Mahal tribe fighting with Al Qaeda.



Knarr: How bad was Al Qaeda? They say that Al Qaeda forced marriages and beheaded people. Is that true?

Sabah: Yes. When I used to go from Al Qaim to Ramadi, I would see 10–15 beheaded bodies with the heads thrown aside. In the Rumana district they did marry some, but they abandoned them afterwards. But they did not force the marriages. Their parents accepted the marriages. Al Qaeda bribed them with money, and the parents were scared of them. This is the worst thing they did in Iraq. And now they have more than 40 children in Diyala. Some of them don't even have a nationality or identity.

Knarr: We read in the newspaper where Al Qaeda had put a sign out in front of Al Qaim that read *Islamic Republic of Al Qaim*. Is that true?

Sabah: Yes, it is correct.

Knarr: Is that at the archway in Husaybah?

Sabah: No. It's in an area between Anah and Qaim called Wadi Ijbah, Ijbah Valley. This is on the Syrian border to Qaim. It was not really a state. It was just a few people with the signs. It wasn't like they had institutions or a government or anything. It was just on paper really. It was just a sign they put up.

Knarr: Okay. When people speak of Al Qaim, they speak as if it were a town. Many times I hear them speak of Al Qaim, and they're speaking of Husaybah. Is Al Qaim a town or is it the district?

Sabah: Husaybah is the center of Al Qaim. It's where you met the Mayor of Al Qaim. Al Qaim borders Syria and stretches all the way to Anah.

Knarr: We had an opportunity to talk to Ahmed Abu-Risha, and he said that the Awakening started out in Al Qaim.

Sabah: I thank him for saying the truth. [24:29]

Knarr: It took so long after it started in Al Qaim to start in Ramadi. Did you speak to Sheikh Sattar? Did you have conversations with him about what you did in Al Qaim?

Sabah: God bless his soul, he came to see me here in Jordan. He informed me of what he was going to do. We spoke and met at my house, here in Jordan. So I was teasing him by telling him that I would send the Albu-Mahal tribe to him and see what they could do. So he answered me, "I will show you what I can do myself!" And that's how he started. He did a great job once he started, and he was a brave man.

Knarr: We find that your tribe is also down near Ramadi and Sofia. So, you have tribal members that were fighting Al Qaeda in Ramadi?

Sabah: Yes. Yes, of course my tribe fought in Ramadi, too.

Knarr: Fasial Al-Gaoud of the Albu-Nimr tribe indicated that Albu-Nimr and Albu-Mahal worked together with the Hamza Brigade.

Sabah: No. Albu-Mahal was only the Desert Protection Force. Albu-Nimr are, of course, our cousins, but to tell you the truth, Al Qaeda infiltrated the middle of the Albu-Nimr. Even in the sheikh's house, they [the sheiks] couldn't say a word to them. But the Desert Protection Force was only Albu-Mahal. Although, there was one gentleman from Albu-Faraja tribe, his name was Muhammad and he was the only one.

Knarr: In 2006, General Ismael was a brigade commander in Al Qaim and now is the 7<sup>th</sup> Division commander.

Sabah: He is my cousin.

Knarr: What I was wondering was that it seems that so many things happened in Al Qaim district—the Desert Protectors, the police force was built, and the government was built. And then at that time, Colonel Ismael was with the Brigade in that area. It seems that by 2006, Al Qaim was stabilized. Is that true?

Sabah: If you compare it to the rest of the province, it was more stabilized, yes.

Knarr: What kind of problems and challenges did they still have in Al Qaim? [29:46]

Sabah: The biggest problem we still have is suicide bombers in the area. This is a big problem for us besides the public services. There are no services. Unemployment is high, and the people need work. As you know, we only have the phosphate plant and the cement factory. There are a limited number of people who are working now. The men who don't work in the cement factory or the phosphate plant are unemployed. This is the problem: if a young man or a head of the family sees himself out of work for a while, he might start thinking in the wrong direction. As you know, the provincial government is not fair to the Anbaris as a whole. I am not saying in Al Qaim only, but for the whole of Anbar, there are no services. They're not providing services to the people of Anbar. The limited budget they give to the districts is not enough and there are no projects. There are no investment projects at all. It's very limited. There is nothing.

Knarr: I believe there were economic development meetings in Jordan in 2005 and 2006. Sir, were you part of some of those conferences they held for economic development in Iraq?

Sabah: I attended them all, but there were no results. It's obvious. You can measure it or you can see it happening now; the Anbaris are poor government employees, they can survive, but those with no jobs are devastated. Billions of dollars have been spent on the province. Where is it? When you walk into the local government offices in Anbar, you wouldn't think you are in Anbar. It's a ghost town. The aftermath of the war is still there. It's a very difficult situation.

Ms. Mary Hawkins: We heard that the Hamza Battalion was initially developed to fight the Americans.

Sabah: To be fair, as I said earlier, in any country that is invaded there will be some resistance. The Hamza Battalion legally has the right to resist the invaders. But when Al Qaeda came, they started to fight Al Qaeda. The Hamza or other brigades, they all started to defend themselves against Al Qaeda. Legally, resistance is accepted because a nation that does not have a resistance is not a nation. When they saw that the Americans were working in the right way, that they were not interfering, they were not arresting innocent people, and they were not killing innocent people, they [the Anbaris] started to integrate into the army and the police. [35:38]

Hawkins: There were two times specifically when there were battles between Al Qaeda and Albu-Mahal. The first one was in May '05, I think you said.

Munther: The biggest fight was on 21 August 2005.

Sabah: Yes, the biggest fight was on 21 August 2005. Before that, there were conflicts. At the end of 2004, we started to fight Al Qaeda, but the biggest one was 21 August 2005.

Hawkins: And is that when some of the Albu-Mahals had to go to Akashat? Can you talk about that?

Sabah: Yes I can. I was here in Amman. I was on my way to Amman on 21 August 2005. I arrived here on Tuesday. On Thursday night, Al Qaeda attacked Husaybah. My tribe had 65 armed men. And there were about 4,000–5,000 of them. They were stationed in Karabilah and Ramana near the Syrian Border, and they were attacking Al Qaim from all directions. The battle continued for six days. The Americans were only attacking certain places, but they were attacking us more. So, the Americans were hitting us and Al Qaeda was hitting us, too.

The commander at the time was Abu Omar, God bless his soul. I called him from Jordan, and I said, "Pull back and go towards Akashat, because they are starting to enter Al Qaim." They could have easily killed the 65 men. I think we had six fatalities and the rest pulled back. We killed more than 70 Al Qaeda. Most were of foreign, Arab nationalities. I saw some of them from their pictures. Two were from Tunisia, one was Libyan, and four were Saudis. They were killed. So they pulled back towards Akashat and hid their families. And other tribes' families started to come with us. They were scared of the war. Sixty of our fighters reached Akashat.

I called the Minister of Defense, Mr. Sa'dun Dulaymi, and I went to visit him in Baghdad. The US Deputy Ambassador and the British Ambassador were there during the meeting. From that day on I told him I would arm the Albu-Mahal tribe. Within a week, the Americans and Iraqi trainees reached Akashat. They gave them cars and weapons. Within two months, the force returned to Al Qaim and liberated Qaim. And thank God, nobody [from AQ] has returned to Al Qaim. That is what happened in Akashat. [40:45]

Knarr: Did you meet General Casey? Was he at the meeting?

Sabah: Yes, I met with Casey. No, he wasn't in the meeting. I met Sanchez. I met John Abizaid. I met them all.

Knarr: Before the August fight, when Albu-Mahal kicked Al Qaeda out of Al Qaim, we understand that was in May after the Police Chief was killed. Is that correct?

Sabah: I can't remember exactly, but they assassinated the Chief of Police the end of 2004 or the beginning of 2005, but I can't remember precisely.

Knarr: But then they fought Al Qaeda and Albu-Mahal kicked Al Qaeda out of Al Qaim I believe in May.

Sabah: After the biggest fight we had, we pulled back to Akashat. Until then, we were continuously fighting with them.

Knarr: Yes. I was wondering then what happened when they won in May until August when Al Qaeda came back. I was wondering what happened.

*Munther and the Sheik discussed the timeline of events because of some confusion.*

Sabah: I am mixed with dates. The big fight was in August. And on 21 August, they went to Akashat. They remained there for two months, and they came back. It was hard. It was a very difficult time when I start remembering what happened...when I saw children walk-

ing barefoot and women being killed in the streets. It really hurts me too much for me to speak about it. [44:56]

LtCol David Graves, USMC: It seems that tribal engagement really didn't start between the Coalition and the tribes until mid-to-late 2005. Why did it take so long?

Sabah: Before the invasion, not me, but all the sheikhs sat with the British. I remember his name was Miller. But it took time for the Americans to understand the Iraqi culture and to understand the influence of the sheikhs. But we were in touch. We wanted to be in touch and engaged, but the Americans didn't understand us then.

Graves: Is there a certain time period or event when that happened?

Sabah: They [the Americans] continued to meet with them [the sheiks]. I'll tell you what happened to me. Take me for example—I was arrested in April 2003, 20 days after the invasion. Why? Somebody from another tribe told the Americans Sheikh Sabah is a terrorist. They arrested me and they kept me for 18 days. They released me after 18 days from Nasiriyah. The problem was that if anybody attacked the Americans from my tribe, they would hold the sheikh responsible. Even if you tried to explain to them that the sheikh cannot be responsible for everyone, they would say, "No, it's the sheikh's responsibility! Why did they attack the Americans?" So all the blame came onto us as the heads of the tribes.

We had some great relations with the commanders on the ground. Some understood us, and we understood them. But others we couldn't even have a relationship with them. They couldn't understand us and we couldn't understand them. So sometimes it was good and sometimes it was bad. The relationship continued, but sometimes it was difficult and sometimes it was easy. That's how it continued.

I remember one case when some innocent people were arrested. We went to the American generals, and we told them they had put the guilty and innocent in the same place. And they didn't listen to the voices of the heads of tribes. They didn't understand us. Then I went back to them, and I said, "You remember in 2007, General Allen requested from us that each tribe should give names of prisoners being held in American prisons [in Iraq]? We took a list of names that the sheikhs would guarantee were innocent, and they [the United States] would guarantee their release." So in Jordan, for example, where I was, we went to all the sheikhs to give us a list of their names and numbers. We gave it to the general's office, and they were released under the sheikhs' guarantee. That happened in 2007 by General Allen. It was a big thing General Allen did. The sheikhs were

in the middle. He [Sheikh Sabah] was being accused by his tribes people and by the Americans. His tribes people were saying, “We [the Sheikhs] are traitors and we spy for the Americans.” And with the Americans called us [the Sheikhs] terrorists! So, we were in the middle at the time. [50:45]

Graves: I understand during one of your battles, you were able to make a phone call and get air support to help out your tribe. How much did that moment define your opinion that the Coalition was there to help Iraqis?

Sabah: They didn’t come immediately. I called from here [Amman]. The Minister of Defense at the time called the American general and requested his help. AQI was planting bombs around my house. We wanted them [the Coalition] to kill them while they were planting the bombs, but the Americans were late. They [AQI] blew up the house. The house was bombed completely, and then the Americans came. I was speaking through a translator to the general. The general said, “Yes we will send helos.” They sent them, but it was too late. But at the time the Americans did help us, and they killed three or four of them. It was a bit late. Time was of the essence. They came after they demolished the house.

Hawkins: How did you decide to fight Al Qaeda? Did you talk to any other sheikhs to decide that you would indeed fight Al Qaeda?

Sabah: No, nobody, only my tribe. But after they assassinated Colonel Ahmed, I sat among my tribes people and I said that we had to retaliate...start attacking. But the rest of the tribal leaders, they were a bit scared. On the contrary, they were saying bad things about me. Except Sattar. After a year, he realized what I did, God bless his soul.

Knarr: Were the Karbulis and the Salmanis the enemies? Were they helping Al Qaeda?

Sabah: Osama Karbuli wasn’t in the area at the time. He was in Baghdad.

Knarr: No, I mean the tribe, Karabilah tribe.

Sabah: I am saying this for history. There are tribes from Qaim, who are my neighbors, and until this minute, they are still supporting Al Qaeda. The reason is to retaliate against the Albu-Mahal tribe. [55:21]

Knarr: Sir, you know this is going back to students in different education institutes in America. What would you want them to know? What are the important things you would want them to know from your experience?

Sabah: The most important thing they must know is the Americans should never invade another country. This is first. Secondly, to deal with the people in a humane way. There were too many crimes, and too many innocent people got killed. I advise the American soldiers to deal with others in a humane way. I'll give you an example. You know, General Allen. He was a gentleman. He was an academic gentleman. He was a noble man. When it comes to war, he's a fighter. On the other hand, when it came to humanitarian issues, he was more humane than the Iraqis. He assisted the people as well. So he had two ways in dealing with his job. He has not forgotten that he is a man as well with a soft heart to the people. And he used to listen to the sheikhs and believed in what they said. He implemented and did what he could for them. I respect him highly, because when he promised something, he did it. And I respect him highly, and I send my regards to him.

Major Peter Tabash: Sheikh Sabah, what was the tribal relationship with Saddam? At what point did he decide to leave Iraq?

Sabah: Saddam had no problem with the tribes. Saddam had conflicts with people who wanted to overthrow him. He hung a lot of people from Anbar, and we are Sunnis just like him. The same way he killed Shia and Kurds, he killed Sunnis as well. Saddam wasn't sectarian. He killed his cousins. Anybody who threatened his position, he would assassinate them. I had a good relationship with him. I met him 19 times. I had no problem with him. Because we didn't want power or his seat, he used to respect us. He used to highly respect the tribal sheikhs from the Shia from the south. He didn't give us the same things that he gave the Shia tribes in the south. He gave them cars. He gave them guest houses. He offered them what he could. He did not give this to us, and we are Sunnis like him.

Saddam wasn't sectarian at all, it didn't matter to him if you were a Shia or a Sunni. Whoever threatened him, he would assassinate them. I have some friends who are Shia. Their relationship was better with Saddam. When we wanted something from Saddam Hussein, we couldn't ask him. We would go through them to request something from Saddam. This is history. This doesn't mean that I was accepting Saddam's rule or the Ba'ath Party. They were bad. Not all of them were bad, but his policy was wrong. His thoughts were wrong. He had too many wars. The biggest mistake in history he made was invading Kuwait. Kuwait is a neighboring country. They are an Arabic country. During the war with Iran, they had stood by us, and they helped us. They assisted us, so it was a big mistake. I think Saddam had different personalities. What do they call it?

Knarr: Multiple personalities.

Hawkins: Schizophrenia. [1:1:55]

Munther: Schizophrenia, yes.

Sabah: On 21 August 2005, I left. It was 2005 when I came here. And the war started after that. They bombed my house. I was number one on Al Qaeda's hit list. I continue going back and forth to Iraq, so I never left Iraq. I remained in Jordan for two years before I returned.

Tabash: Because of Al Qaeda?

Sabah: Because of Al Qaeda. And thank God I returned, and I am starting to rebuild the house that they bombed. And the Americans bombed one of my houses, too! We suffered from both sides, from Al Qaeda and from the Americans.

Knarr: Sir, I would like to thank you very much. You have sacrificed and your people have sacrificed tremendously.

Sabah: We thank God. This is history as you know. We thank God that we have not kneeled to anyone. Al Qaeda tried hard to keep all the Iraqis kneeling down to them. One more important thing I forgot to say. Al Qaeda speaks in the name of Islam, and this is not real Islam. Islam is a forgiving religion and it respects others religion. It would never kill innocent people; this is what Islam is. But they used Islam, and they ruined the name of Islam. And God help us to eliminate all of the bad work they did.



15 May 2010

Subject: Interview with Sheikh Kurdi Rafee Farhan Al-Mahalawi on 17 April 2010

Sheikh Kurdi Rafee Farhan Al-Mahalawi (Albu-Mahal Tribe) was interviewed in his guest residence in Ubaydi, 20 miles east of the Iraqi/Syrian border. Sheikh Sabah Staam Aifan Sharji al-Mahalawi is the paramount Sheikh, but he fled to Jordan in 2005 after his house was burned and family threatened; he left the on-the-ground leadership to Sheikh Kurdi. Sheikh Kurdi was impressive in his stature, demeanor, presence, and frankness.



Sheikh Kurdi, Albu Mahal Tribe

Sheikh Kurdi discussed a number of things including the Albu-Mahal tribe's resistance in 2004 to the Coalition's occupation; the tribe's support for Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) as AQI provided men, money, and resources to fight the Coalition; AQI's cancer-like spread as it sought to control all of Al Qaim; Albu-Mahal leadership negotiations with AQI as the tribe attempted to regain some control over tribal affairs; and then the Albu-Mahal's carte blanche rejection of AQI as AQI brutalized the Iraqis of the region. Albu Mahal attacked AQI in the Al Qaim area during 2–13 May 2005, and decisively won the first battle, ridding the area of AQI. AQI returned in late August later that year with reinforcements from other provinces, defeated the Albu Mahal and then purged them from the Al Qaim area by burning homes and killing families. Sheikh Sabah, paramount Sheikh of the Albu-Mahal fled to Jordan as Sheikh Kurdi, with thousands from his tribe, fled 100 miles southwest to Akashat seeking refuge with another branch of the Albu-Mahals.

Sheikh Kurdi was interviewed by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves on 17 April 2010 at his Guest House in Ubaydi, Iraq. The following is his account of the Awakening in Al Qaim. The interview was conducted with an interpreter.

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Dr. Bill Knarr: So many sacrifices were made, made here at the beginning of the Awakening; we feel very privileged to be able to learn the story from you and your people. Please start by giving your background? Where are you from, how long have you been in Ubaydi?

Sheikh Kurdi Rafee Farhan Al-Mahalawi: I was born in 1951. I finished high school in the Al Qaim area. I also finished my Bachelor degree in History at the University of Baghdad, the Literature College. I was married in 1988. I have two boys and three girls. I worked in instruction and education for 28 years. Now, as you see, I am retired.

Knarr: Please talk about the arrival of the Coalition and then the start of the insurgency.

Kurdi: On the 9th of April, 2003, the Coalition Forces entered Iraq. They weren't trained in the traditions and culture of Iraq, which resulted in some undisciplined American actions and caused a lot of people to hate the Americans.

We have a long history, and social and religious traditions we are proud of. The American strategy in Iraq lacked knowledge of these traditions and it cost the Americans a lot.  
[5:00]

The insurgency that started to grow in the area, this resistance, when it started, some of the people [that resisted] were right and some of them were wrong. I am talking about Al Qaim in Al Anbar Province. There was tremendous patriotic resistance here in Al Qaim, but there was no cooperation among the [Coalition] commanders who came to the region with the people of Al Qaim.

At first, Al Qaeda managed to get inside society here. Most people in this area considered Al Qaeda to be "the complete Jihad." However, starting in mid-2004, Al Qaeda started doing some things in the area that the people didn't like. All of the tribal Sheikhs in the region— including Sheikh Sabah as the general Sheikh of the Albu-Mahal tribe— met with the Al Qaeda leaders. [7:30] There was some debate and the Sheikhs requested only one thing: to establish local authority here in the region, including police and an army. Al Qaeda completely rejected this and that was the beginning of the Albu-Mahal tribe separating from Al Qaeda.

The Albu-Mahal tribe then established that local authority. It secured the position of the mayor and began forming the police and the army from within the ranks of the Albu-Mahal tribe. Captain Ahmed Adiya Asaf was the police director then. After 10–15 days, the Captain was killed by Al Qaeda in the market area. This sparked the first fight between the Albu-Mahal tribe and Al Qaeda. [9:50]

This big fight between Al Qaeda and the Albu-Mahal began on the 2nd of May 2005, and it ended about the 13th of May. The American Forces in the region at the time played no part in attempting to disengage the two sides. The Americans played no role in solving this

problem. In May, during this first battle, Al Qaeda couldn't drive the Albu-Mahal tribe out of the area—the Albu-Mahal kicked out Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda wasn't anywhere in Al Qaim city<sup>1</sup>, but it had some cells in Ramanah and the other cities like Karabilah.

So Al Qaeda started to regroup once they lost that fight. The second fight happened on the 25th of July, 2005. Al Qaeda started by gathering all its fighters from other provinces like Mosul, Diyala, Baghdad, Ramadi, Salah ad-Din, Al Amariyah. A lot of them came to this region to fight the Albu-Mahal tribe. And, as you know, the equipment [weaponry] that the Albu-Mahal tribe had then didn't compare to what Al Qaeda had, nor did the number of troops. It was not equal at all.

Knarr: How many troops did Al Qaeda have?

Kurdi: [14:00] It had an army. Brigades, battalions, companies, and a lot of different weapons, like artillery. They had a variety of fighters, weapons, ammunition, because they were so organized then. We couldn't fight back! And they had a lot of financial support from abroad.

Knarr: How many people did you have and did you have other tribes in the area to help you?

Kurdi: We had no more than 300–400 men at the time.

Knarr: Did any of the other tribes help?

Kurdi: During those first two battles with Al Qaeda, the only tribe was the Albu-Mahal.

Knarr: Were there any other tribes fighting against you?

Kurdi: Yes.

Knarr: I mean, Karbuli, did they fight against you?

Kurdi: The Al Karabilah tribe, Al-Salmani, and Albu Hadan. Other tribes stood still; they didn't do anything—nothing to support us, nothing to stand against us. There were different combinations of tribes, some of them stood against us, some of them did nothing. [16:15]

The battle lasted four days—from 25–29 July 2005. That time, Al Qaeda managed to kick the Albu-Mahal tribe out of Al Qaim. All the Albu-Mahal tribesmen who lost went to Akashat for 2–3 months. During that time, Albu-Mahal established a force called the

<sup>1</sup> Many people refer to Husaybah along the Iraqi-Syrian border as the city of Al Qaim. Even maps, such as the Tactical Pilotage Chart (TPC G4-C) of Iraq reflects the “Husaybah (Al Qa'im).”

Desert Protection Force. The Minister of Defense was Sa'dun Dulaymi who supported the Desert Protection Force. [17:50] There were negotiations and meetings among the tribe and its force and the government and the ministry to discuss the situation, and they included Sheikh Sabah in Jordan. [18:15]

During the first two battles, the Albu-Mahal lost more than 60 martyrs. Al Qaeda blew up the houses of 41 Albu-Mahal tribesmen using propane tanks. One of the houses was Sheikh Saba's house.

Once the Desert Protection Force formed, the first QRF [Quick Reaction Force] brigade was sent to Al Qaim under the command of Brigadier General Razak Salim Hamza. The [friendly] force in Al Qaim comprised the first QRF brigade, [elements of] the Desert Protection Force established in Akashat, and the Marines that were under command of Colonel Alford at the time. Because of the cooperation of these three forces, they were well organized and they kicked Al Qaeda out of Al Qaim. [20:41]

There was a brutal battle in the Al Qaim area called [Operation] STEEL CURTAIN. Al Qaim was liberated gradually. All of these areas and surrounding cities started one by one, Al Qaim then Al Karabilah, then Al Ubaydi, then Ramanah and so on. All of these cities are now stable.

It was then that the Iraqi Police were gradually forming. A lot of people were afraid of joining the Iraqi Police. The first ones who started joining were from the Albu-Mahal tribe. As I recall, the numbers that joined from other tribes were ten from Al Karabilah, and about 40 from Al Saman, and rest were Albu-Mahal. Those were the most supportive tribes. Albu-Faraj, [unintelligible] from the Ramanah area supported us later. [23:00]

At that point we had a new situation of joint cooperation between the American Forces and the local authorities in the area. The director for this relationship was Colonel Alford. He was a true leader. He has all the qualities of a good and proficient leader. We have helped him with all the support we can in his mission. We have listened to him, and when what he says he needs is right and good, we do it, and when it is not, we will not do it. After the Al Qaim battle, Colonel Alford stayed not more than four months, but all the favor goes to him because he was the first to help us kick out Al Qaeda. He's the one that helped all the people in the area. [25:13]

We then started opening discussions with the rest of the tribal leaders in the area. They were convinced that cooperating with the Americans was the true thing to do to get rid of

Al Qaeda. So I started discuss this situation with the tribal leaders in the weekly meeting to.

Knarr: When did that start?

Kurdi: At the end of December 2005.

Kurdi: He [Alford] proficiently controlled all these things.. When Colonel Alford's mission in Iraq ended, he went back to the States. [27:23-29:05]

Colonel Nick Murano came with a new team after Colonel Alford. Colonel Murano's performance with his team benefitted from Colonel Alford's feedback about the situation and about how to act with the Iraqis. He had a big heart when dealing with all the Iraqis and gave us all the help we needed. He used the same policy as Colonel Alford . Before Colonel Alford left, Brigadier Ismael was the commander here, now he's the 7th Division Commander. He worked with Colonel Alford for one month and then served with Colonel Murano.

Knarr: We talked to General Ismael.

Kurdi: Yes! [By the time Colonel Murano had arrived] we had gradually extended the stability in Al Qaim to Anah. The same thing that had happened in Al Qaim was happening in Anah. The American Forces, the Iraqi Forces, and the fighters from the Albu-Mahal tribe went to Anah to kick out the terrorists. [30:45] Brigadier Ismael said that when a new commander would come to the area, he would ask, "The previous commander has provided me this, what do you have to offer so we can do much better?" The American commander would then ask Brigadier Ismael, "What do you want exactly?" [At this point], he asked for a checkpoint in the [Zela] area and another checkpoint in the Jazeera area, so that's how the stability gradually expanded.

Knarr: Where is the Jazeera area?

Kurdi: It's north of the river, which is also called Jazeera, it's a desert.

Knarr: [32:00] You said that the MOD, Minister of Defense, Dulaymi helped; were there any other government officials that helped you during that time?

Kurdi: No. Not a single one helped us. I even talked to the Prime Minister in a meeting that we had in the Ramadi area, but nothing came out of that.

Knarr: What about Governor Mamoun?

Kurdi: Although he was responsible for Al Anbar, he was focused on Ramadi because it was one of the hottest areas in the province, and the situation culminated when the Al Qaeda organization had a demonstration in July [2006] on 17th Street against the government. This occurred in front of everyone: the Americans, the Iraqis, and everyone was there, and no one could say anything to them.

Knarr: When Al Qaeda came and the Albu-Mahal tribe left, where did you go?

Kurdi: I went to Akashat also.

Alford: He came back during STEEL CURTAIN. I met him right after. I met him in November, right after STEEL CURTAIN. Right at the end of STEEL CURTAIN, he was the first to stand up.

Knarr: We keep hearing about the Hamza Battalion, is that another name for the Desert Protectors?

Kurdi: [35:45] Al Hamza battalions were a group formed from Albu-Mahal to fight the Americans. This is a fact. However, when the people began to suffer from Al Qaeda as a result of their killing, destroying houses, bombing, VBIEDs, IEDs, the Hamza battalions began to fight back against Al Qaeda. They fought first against the Americans as Jihad, Islamic Jihad, but this changed; as a tribal organization, they started fighting back against members of Al Qaeda.

Alford: [38:13] Here's what we were talking about earlier, how some of the generals and higher ups were having a hard time supporting Albu-Mahal, because they were fighting us. Well, I'd be fighting us too, right? The way we acted. And I had to tell him [Kurdi] that. I mean, I had some difficulties at the very beginning because they [the higher ups] were saying, "You're going to side with these people who were killing us last year?!" And my response was, "Well if I were them, I'd be killing us too because of the way we acted in '03/'04."

Kurdi: Your opinion is completely right. Without the cooperation of Colonel Alford and the American troops, the Albu-Mahal would still be finding terrorists living here, and no one would be able to kick them out, not the Americans, not the Iraqis, nobody.

Alford: It took all of us together.

Kurdi: Yes.

Knarr: [40:05] Some Iraqis have said that because of American and Al Qaeda brutality against the Iraqis, they thought that the Americans were working with Al Qaeda against the Iraqis.<sup>2</sup> Your comment?

Kurdi: [41:52-43:38] A lot changed when the Al Qaeda organization started its terrorism against the Iraqi people. When that began, a lot of people wanted to fight with the Americans against Al Qaeda, because Al Qaeda cut off a lot of heads, destroyed a lot of houses, destroyed infrastructure. We saw a lot of bodies thrown everywhere. Not a single city was without dozens of bodies thrown everywhere, whether in the street or elsewhere. Al Qaeda's actions and its terrorism towards the Iraqi people changed all Iraqi perceptions—even if they had considered the Americans as their enemy, by this time, they wanted to cooperate with the Americans to get rid of Al Qaeda.

I am speaking for myself. From 2003 to 2005, I had not met any Americans. After 2005, not having reached a deal with Al Qaeda, I said, I will cooperate with the Americans, even with the devil, if it means kicking Al Qaeda out of the area.

Knarr: I have heard that in 2005, Al Qaeda was so strong that they put a sign at the arch going into Husaybah that said, "The Islamic Republic of Al Qaim." Is that true?<sup>3</sup>

Kurdi: No, this is not true. The Islamic logo was not distributed when they first came in.

Knarr: So Al Qaeda had no sign out in front of the arches in Husaybah that said that they owned Al Qaim?

Kurdi: No, not outside. [Emphatically] No, this is not correct. [45:38-46:29]

Al Qaim's strategic location was very significant to Al Qaeda. They thought that by controlling this area—because it's on the Iraqi border—they would have supplies, finance, and weapons; everything they needed to support operations. When they lost this location, this strategic location, they lost everything: all the logistics support that came from outside Iraq was cut off. No more support of any kind! That's why when they lost the battle here, they lost everything inside Iraq because everything was coming through the border. Also, it was not just supplies from Al Qaim to Anbar Province, but supplies to all Iraqi provinces.

<sup>2</sup> This question was developed from the Marine Corps Anthology interviews.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen Knickmeyer and Jonathan Finer, "Insurgents Assert Control Over Town Near Syrian Border," *Washington Post*, 6 September 2005. "Residents said the foreign-led fighters controlled by Zarqawi, a Jordanian, apparently had been exerting authority in the town, within two miles of the Syrian border, since at least the start of the weekend. A sign posted at an entrance to the town declared, 'Welcome to the Islamic Republic of Qaim.'"

Knarr: When Al Qaeda was here you indicated that they had rejected your request to start your own local security but that you started it anyway. What else did they reject? I understand that they disrespected the tribes and the families and they took over the economy, is that true?

Kurdi: That meeting with the Al Qaeda leaders happened at the start of 2005, maybe February or March 2005. They said that they rejected the idea of establishing any kind of authority inside the area—whether local authority or police or army—they refused and said, “We are responsible here for the security, you are not!”

Knarr: We heard there were forced marriages; is that true?

Kurdi: The people who supported Al Qaeda at the time were housing them and had complete faith in what Al Qaeda represented then. Because of that, they sheltered Al Qaeda members. When someone comes from abroad [and is staying in their house], according to Islam, they can’t commit adultery, so they have to be legally married. So the members of Al Qaeda convinced the simple people to allow them to marry their daughters. Because they were fighting the infidels, the Al Qaeda members said, “We are fighting the infidels, and this is Jihad,” and with that idea, the simple people had complete faith and allowed them to marry their daughters.

Knarr: What did I miss that you think that the students, officers, and NCOs need to know as they go through our military education system? What else would you say that I have not asked you?

Kurdi: I have two points to clarify. [1] There is a wrong concept of naming the Awakening. The Awakening was released [started] after the liberation of Al Qaim, Anah, and Rawah. [However,] it wasn’t until eight months later that they started the Awakening concept. This is one concept that should be known by everyone.<sup>4</sup>

[2] My word to all the American officers, NCOs, and soldiers, wherever they are, whether in the States, here in Iraq, or in Afghanistan—he one thing I am asking from every single commander: We know that all of the American troops are from different countries, from different traditions, different religions, but they must understand that the Arabs and Muslims, specifically, have their own traditions, and they have their own religion. Being aware of these traditions will open a lot of doors whether for negotiation or support, or

<sup>4</sup> The Awakening started long before the concept was realized and coined in Ramadi.



any thing else necessary to complete the mission safely. Understand the religion and traditions of the country you are going to. That's the most important thing that everyone, every combatant, every soldier must know. [55:20]

One thing I should also mention, that the weapon is not always the answer. Using power is not always the answer. Negotiate, negotiate, negotiate; and then fight. When you are completely convinced that there is no more negotiating that can be done, at that time, you can use power, the military way.

Another big mistake that Americans have made is listening to people who only care about their own benefit, not the Iraqi people's benefits. And also, don't listen to the people who have no significant control in the Iraqi way of life. If they do not participate, they do not have any single significant thing to share with the Iraqi people.

Alford: We listened to Chalabi.<sup>5</sup>

Kurdi: Not only Chalabi from the political level. We are also talking about the local authority, or the personnel who have the authority, whether in Al Qaim, Rawah, Anah, Ramadi, Fallujah, Mosul, Baghdad, Diyala—everywhere. They are the ones who should listen to the elders and listen to the people who live in these areas. We should not listen just to people in a position of authority; we should listen to the people of these areas and cooperate with them, so we can solve every problem.

I will give you a small example of what happened right here in Al Qaim. Of the seven [Coalition] commanders who have served in this area of Iraq, five have more than excellent relationships with the tribes: Colonel Alford, Colonel Murano, Colonel Schuster, Colonel Bohm, Colonel Baumgarten, Colonel Gross, Colonel Wolfe. But we didn't get any cooperation from Colonel Gross. When Colonel Gross came, we didn't receive as much cooperation from him as with previous commanders. [In fact], we had no cooperation from him at all. Everything we had done with the previous teams we no longer could do because he wasn't responsive. Any commander who comes here must listen, understand, and negotiate with the people. He didn't do that. That is, I think, a fact you should know. And probably you will ask me, you may wonder, why this relation got worse?

Knarr: Yes, why? [1:00:47–1:04:02]

<sup>5</sup> Ahmed Abdel Hadi Chalabi was interim oil minister in Iraq in April–May 2005 and December–January 2006, and was deputy prime minister from May 2005 until May 2006

Kurdi: On this land used to be a big farm planted with a lot of vegetables, or wheat, or sesame, anything, potatoes, anything. He brought that base [COP Ubaydi, an expansion of what was known as COP Tripoli] and put it right on this farm. On that piece of land, Colonel Gross came and put an American base on it. This land we inherited from our great grandfathers. It was our property that we inherited through our grandfathers. We talked to him and the mayor talked to him, spent several hours and days, just to convince him not to take that piece of land because it was ours. No conservation took place. They [the Americans] changed the agriculture, the nature of that land. They put down gravel and sand. They changed it without any advice from us. This is our land and he should not have taken it. Instead, he started destroying all the water plants, all the irrigation systems that were there, he destroyed it all. That's why the relationship between Colonel Gross and us changed completely.

We not only spoke Colonel Gross, we have also gone higher up the chain of command to the general, but there has been no response from anyone. This issue has upset us very much.

Alford: [To Kurdi] The last American unit is leaving that base in two weeks. They're turning it over to the Iraqi Government.

Kurdi: So? What's the use?

Alford: Right, I mean they burned it already right?

Kurdi: Yes. It's our land, but it's destroyed. It's completely destroyed. We can't plant anything anymore. If I want to change the nature once again to agricultural, I have to spend at least \$250,000 for that, just to make it like it was before and it will never be the same.

Alford: We can screw stuff up! These are examples of how we make mistakes out of ignorance. Originally, we had a little outpost there, Triploi, in 2005. We built the outpost in order to put that bridge in, to over-watch that bridge; that was the original spot. Hell, he [Kurdi] gave it to me; he's the one that told me to do it. Do you remember when I put the bridge in there and the outpost to over-watch the bridge?

Kurdi: Yes, that's the property of the government, we just told him to move [expand] it east, because the east it belongs to the government; the west [where he expanded it] belongs to us, so we just told him to move that base to the east.

Alford: What we did was on the government land. Do you remember when you gave us that little spot and we put the bridge in?

Kurdi: That road that goes directly to the bridge separates the government land to the east and from our property to the west.

Alford: He [Gross] built the thing [the base] the wrong way.

Kurdi: We told him to put it east of the street, so that wouldn't harm us, but he didn't, he refused.

Alford: And we wonder why they shoot at us! It's frustrating. For me, coming back and hearing that!

Kurdi: I've told you the whole truth and nothing but the truth. I am responsible in front of you and in front of God, and in front of everybody. I am responsible for every word I've said.

Knarr: And we appreciate your honesty.

Kurdi: My best regards. I want you to send my best regards to all the commanders who worked in Al Anbar Province. It's an honor. It's a privilege to see Colonel Alford once again! I consider him a brother to me. I hope you'll send my best regards to Colonel Murano and Colonel Schuster, Colonel Bohm and Colonel Baumgarten. And also, send my best to Colonel Gross and Colonel Wolfe also. And I send a special greeting for my dear Colonel Gridley, and General Allen.

Knarr: General Allen, yes.

Kurdi: General Gaskin.

Alford: Gaskin yes!

Kurdi: We are very proud and pleased for this visit. Send our best regards to all the persons we just mentioned and to every single person in the states.

Knarr: We will. Thank you.

Kurdi: Thank you very much.

Knarr: [This question was asked later] I understand that Al Zarqawi was wounded here in Al Qaim. Is that true?

Kurdi: Al Qaim Province is very important to Al Qaeda for their supply lines. After the fight between Al Qaeda and the US Forces, and because this place was very important, Zarqawi—he's their leader—he came here to support his guys. During the fight he got hit by a raid and was wounded. They transferred him to the general hospital in Ramadi, and because they worried about his life and that the Americans would discover him, they

moved him to Iran. When he came back, he went to Diyala, because Diyala is an important base for Al Qaeda. The American Forces found him in Diyala and killed him over there.

Knarr: When was he here and when was he wounded?

Kurdi: I don't know the exact date, but I think it was mid-2005. I'm not sure, but maybe in June or July.

Alford: It wasn't when the Albu-Mahal were fighting Al-Qaeda, it was during a US raid.

Knarr: Okay, a US raid.

Kurdi: Yes, exactly.

Knarr: Okay. Thank you very much.

Knarr: [This note was taken after the interview/recording session]. Please say that again so I can write it down.

Sheikh Kurdi: When Colonel Alford and his Marines came I said, "The sun of freedom, rises in the west!"

Knarr: Wow! That's good.

24 December 2010

Subject: Interview with Al Qaim's Mayor Farhan De Hal Farhan

Mayor Farhan was an Air Defense Officer in the Iraqi Army. As an Iraqi general and former Ba'athist he worked for a year as the Mayor without pay as a result of policies developed by the Coalition Provisional Authority and perpetuated by the Government of Iraq. Two days after this interview Mayor Farhan walked the team through the marketplace in Husaybah, which was packed with produce, goods, and people. In addition, the construction and new housing starts reflect the vast improvements in this district during the last few years.



Mayor Farhan of Al Qaim was interviewed at Sheikh Kurdi's (Albu Mahal Tribe) guesthouse in Ubaydi on 17 April 2010. The interview was conducted by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, USMC, and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC. An interpreter was used for the interview. The following is his account of the Awakening.

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Dr. Bill Knarr: Please start by providing your background information.

Mayor Farhan De Hal Farhan: First of all, my name is Farhan De Hal Farhan. I was born in 1955. I am married, and I have three daughters and two sons. I am a retired general; I was in the former Iraqi Army. I worked in Air Defense in the Rocket Division. I was elected by the Sheiks and City Council of Al Qaim to serve as the Mayor in late 2005, and I still hold this position.

I have a B.A. in Political Science. In June, I will start a Master's program in History.

Knarr: Please talk about the Al Qaim area.

Farhan: Al Qaim is a rural village area in Western Iraq. It shares a border with Syria for more than 250 kilometers. The Euphrates River goes through Al Qaim. The total population of the area is more than 200,000. Al Qaim is well-known for its agriculture, and there are two main factories: a cement plant and a phosphate plants. Currently, an Iraqi company is leading a major research initiative to search for natural gas.

Al Qaim's population comes from genuine Iraqi tribes. We also have a couple of religious minorities, but all of the people are living in harmony. They're living under the rule of law and under the constitution. [06:20]

During 2003–2005, Al Qaim was a popular area for terrorists crossing the Syrian border. Everyone could cross the borders because there were no guards. The terrorists still sneak across the borders into Al Qaim. They started hampering security and killing Sheikhs and officials. Their behavior inside the city caused some people to rebel against them, but some of the tribes joined them.

There were a lot of battles between the tribes—especially the Albu-Mahal—and the terrorists. In 2005, there were two battles between them. The Albu-Mahal won the first battle and kicked Al Qaeda out of the area. After that, Al Qaeda gathered supporters, built their forces, and fought the Albu-Mahal tribe again. Within four days, Al Qaeda had won, and they kicked the Albu-Mahal tribe out of the area. At the time, Mr. Sadun al-Dulaymi, who was running the government, sent QRF [??] teams. They gave the orders to establish a new force to fight the terrorists in Al Qaim, and with the cooperation of the Marines and Colonel Alford, they won the next battle. [10:00]

The concept for the Awakening came from the awakening of conscience, [or conscious?] and this Awakening started here in Al Qaim. Everybody knows that Al Qaim established the first provincial government. They also started the Iraqi Police [IP] Force. Within eight months of establishing the Awakening group [in Al Qaim], the media started talking about the Awakening all over Anbar. Everyone knows that the [foreign] terrorists [came through Al Qaim first, via Syria]. Al Qaim is the first city where an Awakening group existed. The lesson that all Anbaris have taken to join the Awakening group came from Al Qaim, this city.

[What contributed to the beginning of the Awakening was that] The insurgents started cutting off heads. That led everyone in this area to fight against the insurgency. Everybody knows that Al Qaeda members are thieves and robbers and don't have an education, so they knew that they joined Al Qaeda to protect themselves from the government and from the law. Because of their background, they don't have any respect for the people and used force to control them. Additionally, there were no [Coalition or Government] forces then to protect the people of Al Qaim from Al Qaeda. The tribes, especially the Albu-Mahal, kept fighting Al Qaeda, and finally, at the end, kicked Al Qaeda out. This was the Awakening. [12:47]

Knarr: During the time that Al Qaeda was in control, where did you live? Where did you go?

Farhan: I lived in Fallujah. It was worse in Fallujah; there were a lot of Al Qaeda members living there. I moved with my family from Fallujah back to Al Qaim when the terrorists became more active in Fallujah and stayed here. Now I live in Ubaydi. Once security returned to Al Qaim, the Sheikhs and the City Council elected me to be Mayor. Colonel Alford was there then and witnessed all the procedures for my election. I worked as mayor for more than a year without being paid.

Alford [to Knarr]: Do you remember me telling you that the leadership was saying he couldn't be the mayor because he was in former Iraqi Army? And I was saying, "If you're not making him mayor, you come out here and tell him!" [15:21]

Knarr: Yes.

Farhan: Yes, and I said the same thing—"If you don't have another mayor just let me be the mayor."

Alford: Yeah, because none of them had the courage to come out here and be the mayor.

Farhan: Yes. I asked everybody, "Is there anyone who wants to be a mayor?" And they all refused!

Alford: When General Casey started coming out here, I introduced him to General Casey, and I told him that story. That's why I say he's one of the real heroes.

Farhan: Yes, I met with General Casey on December 15, 2005, and he was the Coalition Force Commander at that time. When General Casey asked me, "What type of support do you want from us?" I told him, "I want for the American Forces to stay here to protect us and support us." And the US Forces stayed here and started establishing the new Iraqi Army. Security stabilized step by step. The locals didn't have enough courage to volunteer for the Iraqi Army or the Iraqi Force then; they were afraid the insurgents would cut off their heads. The tribes and all the tribe members also were afraid to volunteer for the Iraqi Police Force. I asked the Sheikhs, under the patronage of Colonel Alford, to ask the tribe members, "Who's going to volunteer for the IP Force?"

They wanted to start with 200 individuals. Most of the volunteers came from the Albu-Mahal tribe. The Albu-Karbuli tribe had 10 volunteers, and the Albu-Salman tribe had 35. This was the first set.

I spoke with the Albu-Salman and Karbuli tribe leaders and told them that if those individuals passed the exams to be IP members, they were going to be accepted. All 10 volunteers from the Albu-Karbuli tribe passed, and 33 of the 35 from the Albu-Salman tribe passed. [20:13]

At that point, the US Forces transferred all those officers from this area [Ubaydi] to Baghdad for training. Of the 33 guys [from Albu-Salman] accepted, only 11 showed up. Then they got other individuals to join to total 200 to become IPs. When people began to realize that security was stable, the number of volunteers increased. With support from the United States Marine Corps, the IA, and all the locals, they did a lot to increase the number of IP members here [in Al Qaim]. They also expanded the area where they operated to Anah, Rawah, and other cities. Right now the IP's job is to protect inside the city. The IA's job is to protect outside the city. IP Forces now are drawn from all the tribes. Thank God security is stable right now!

Knarr: Now, the IPs when they were recruited, could they work anywhere from Husaybah to Ubaydi to Rawah? Was it that whole area?

Farhan: Yes, at the beginning it was joint operation between the IPs and the IA. After security was stable, they started building the bases for the IP Force in Anah and Rawah. They transferred officers from Al Qaim to other areas, because of their experience. They took major steps towards stabilizing security in other districts with the IA's help.

Knarr: You said you went to Fallujah—I am trying to figure out when you came here?

Farhan: I was in Fallujah in 1985, because of my job. When Al Qaeda members entered Fallujah, I grabbed my family and went back to Al Qaim. That was the end of 2004 And I have been here since.

John Frost [cameraman]: It will be interesting to know if he was there [in Fallujah] during one of the first operations, if his opinion was that there were terrorists in the city during the first operation.

Knarr: Okay. You moved here at the end of 2004? Is that correct? [26:02]

Farhan: Yes, before the second battle of Fallujah [Operation AL FAJR] happened.

Knarr: Was Al Qaeda in Fallujah in 2004?

Farhan: Yes, they were in '04 sir, which is why I moved my family from Fallujah to Al Qaim.



Knarr: Okay, so foreign fighters and Al Qaeda were in Fallujah. In fact, that's why we fought the second battle of Fallujah. Because of Al Qaeda and terrorists in Fallujah, you moved your family to Al Qaim. Is that correct?

Farhan: Yes, that's what happened. I moved my family two months before the second battle. I moved at the beginning of September, because the second battle started in November.

Knarr: So you have lived here with your family since September of 2004?

Farhan: Yes.

Knarr: When Al Qaeda came here in 2005, fought Albu-Mahal in August '05, kicked Albu-Mahal out of the area, and Albu-Mahal moved to Akashat, you stayed here in Al Qaim with your family? Is that correct?

Farhan: Yes, I was in Ubaydi, sir.

Knarr: You and your family must be very brave! That must have been very hard!

Farhan: Yes. I don't want to say it was a brave thing. If Al Qaeda members had known I was here, they would have killed my daughters. When Al Qaeda came here, they were looking for the primary Sheikhs. like Sheikh Sabah and his brothers. That's why all the main Sheikhs, like Sheikh Sabah and his family, moved away. They were afraid.

That's also why there was a Diwan here. A Diwan is where all the tribes gather and conduct the annual meetings and other events. Al Qaeda blew it up to stop the tribes from meeting and getting ready. In tribal traditions, the Diwan exists to help the tribes solve the problems; it is for everybody to get together to solve problems. We find out what is going on within the tribe and in other tribes. It is significant and means a lot to the tribes, so that's why the first thing Al Qaeda did was to destroy the Diwan.

Knarr: So what is a Diwan? Is it a meeting? Is it a building hall that you bring people to, like a town meeting?

Farhan: Exactly, sir. It's all of those things, but much bigger. Right now, this is Diwan [where we were conducting the interview]. Sheikh Sabah has the biggest Diwan. It's the whole concept; it's not just about the building. [31:26]

Knarr: Thank you. In September 2005, reporters wrote that Al Qaeda posted a sign in the archway going into Husaybah that they owned Husaybah. They renamed it the Islamic Republic of Al Qaim for Al Qaeda. Is that true?

Farhan: When Al Qaeda takes over a place, it is common for them to call it Islamic country. Like when they took over Hadithah and Fallujah, they named it the Islamic Country of Fallujah and Hadithah. This is common for Al Qaeda to do, but as far as putting up a sign on the arches that says that, no, that didn't happen.

Knarr: Another thing we had heard was that when Al Qaeda came, they forced marriages with some of the women in the tribe. Is that true? [35:37]

Farhan: Yes, but it's not their way, it's the other [peoples'] way. A lot of foreigners came over here to fight and they found some sympathizers to help and support them. So they [the foreigners] convinced them [the locals] to marry their sisters or daughters in the name of religion. The foreigners would get people to feel sympathy for them by saying they were here to help and fight the bad guys. It's forbidden in Islam to force a girl to get married to anyone else, so that's why they took this other approach to convince them [the women] to marry them.

Knarr: And that was through religion?

Farhan: Yes, through cash and politics. Just look at the women these foreigners married. Now they have abandoned them and no one knows where they [the foreign fighters] are. These women were taken advantage of. And it really shows the background of the foreigners.

Knarr: That's a good point. What else would you want military students, officers, and NCOs [non-commissioned officers] to know about the Awakening that I haven't asked you? [38:39]

Farhan: I very much want to send a message to all of the officers in the United States military or anywhere else, that the Awakening means the awakening of consciousness. In the beginning they called it *Rescue* [insert Arabic for rescue?], but they changed it to *Awakening* because it means more. Just look at the people who fight and support the Awakening group, like the Albu-Mahal tribe. They help us and support us, and they fight Al Qaeda. It should be a lesson to all, and this lesson comes from Al Qaim.

When the Awakening was created, it was very popular. Everybody saw how it would help and support. But after security stabilized here and the Awakening became more of a political party, its members started showing a bit of ego, or let's say some kind of bragging...

Knarr: Arrogance?

Farhan: Yes, arrogance against the locals. That's why they lost a little bit of their popularity among the people, among the citizens. Look at what happened in the provincial elections: They did not win, because people don't like them anymore. That's one of the main reasons why the Awakening group isn't as popular anymore. [42:20]

Frost [cameraman]: I guess the question I was getting at earlier was that, in Fallujah, during the first battle, were there any foreign fighters?

Knarr: Okay [John], I know what you're saying. [To Farhan] We've heard two different stories. During the first battle of Fallujah when you were there in April of 2004, were there foreign fighters and Al Qaeda in Fallujah, or did they come later? [44:04]

Farhan: Yes, I should be more frank. I was in Fallujah during the first battle. Al Qaeda was not in Fallujah then. The people who fought the first battle were citizens of Fallujah. After the first battle, they established a Fallujah Army. The American Forces were outside Fallujah, and Al Qaeda members started to sneak in. Some of Fallujah's citizens sympathized with Al Qaeda there. There were some small fights between the Fallujah Army, the people of Fallujah, and Al Qaeda, because the Fallujah Army considered themselves the genuine fighters against occupation. That's why, when the second battle happened, and US Forces got to Fallujah, there was no significant resistance. I was not there during the second battle, but I heard there was not a lot of resistance to the US Forces.

Knarr: Yes, but was Al Qaeda there?

Farhan: Yes. The reason why resistance was so weak then was because the the Fallujah Army and Al Qaeda were fighting each other.

Knarr: Were Janabi and Hadid in Fallujah?

Farhan: Yes, they were commanders of Al Qaeda. There were the main leaders for Al Qaeda during the second battle.

Knarr: Was Zargawi there?

Farhan: I don't know about him, sir. I left two months earlier. I had a lot of friends in Fallujah, and I heard some rumors about Janabi. He used to have a long beard. After US Forces took over Fallujah, he shaved his beard and wore traditional clothing. He went to the US Forces and they moved him outside Fallujah. No one has seen him since then. US Forces transferred him to Saqlawiyah. I heard this from friends who were in Fallujah, but I am not sure how much if it is true.

Knarr: Well, you cleared up the Al Qaeda, the Fallujah Brigade, and the Janabi and Hadid parts for me I think. Thank you. I don't have any other questions. I think that is it. I would like to thank you for your time. [49:21]

Farhan: I am so happy to see you, sir.

Knarr: I don't think the Americans know how brave the Iraqis have been and how much they sacrificed. We established certain policies like de-Ba'athification, and I don't think Americans know the implications of many of the things that we did.

Farhan: Yes, this is a very good opportunity for me to tell the whole truth. Thank God that Colonel Alford is over here. He has witnessed everything I have told you about and that has happened here. I have given you the whole truth. Al Qaim is considered to be the place that sparked the fight against Al Qaeda. Unfortunately, Al Qaim hasn't been lucky getting the media to cover all of its stories.

I met with the Prime Minister [who was it then?] in June '06. I gave him all the facts about the Al Qaim area and how much everything had progressed. The Prime Minister himself was surprised. I doubt that the Prime Minister knew about Al Qaim before that.

4 December 2010

Subject: Interview with Colonel Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf, former Desert Protector

In the late summer of 2005, Colonel Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf organized defensive forces in Akashat to protect Albu-Mahal tribe members who had fled the brutal attacks of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Those forces would later be known as the Desert Protectors and would be the first government- and Coalition-sanctioned training and equipping of a Sunni tribe against AQI.



**COL Ahmad, Desert Protector**

In September 2005, Colonel Ahmad travelled to Baghdad and met with the Minister of Defense, Dr. Sadun Juwayr Farhan al-Rishawi al-Dulaymi. He sought weapons, funding, and legitimacy as an active Iraqi Army force. A team was sent from Baghdad to vet the members of the tribe for integration into the Army. Two-hundred and seventy-one were approved to join the Army and were called the Desert Protectors. US Special Forces took 89 of the 279 to Habbaniyah and trained them. The others remained with Colonel Ahmad to defend the Akashat area against Al Qaeda.

In 2007, Colonel Ahmad commanded the then-approximately 300 Desert Protectors and integrated them into the Iraqi Army. Specifically, they became the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade (later redesignated the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade) of the 7<sup>th</sup> Iraq Army Division.

Colonel Ahmad was interviewed on 18 April 2010 at the Mayor's office in Husaybah by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, USMC, and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC. An interpreter was used during the interview. The following is his account of the Awakening.

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Dr. Bill Knarr: Please provide your background. Where did you grow up and what did you do before the Coalition came?

Colonel Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf: I was born in 1964 in Al Qaim, and I grew up in Al Qaim. I finished high school in Al Qaim. In 1983, I joined the Iraqi Military Academy and I graduated with the rank of Lieutenant. In '03 I became a Lieutenant Colonel; after Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and the Army was disbanded I worked in the free business.

Knarr: The free business, what is that?

Ahmad: Construction.

Knarr: How did the Coalition treat you when they arrived?

Ahmad: There was no connection between us and the Coalition Forces. I was at an Iraqi base in Habbaniyah and on April 12<sup>th</sup> I heard that everybody should go home. There was no battle between us and the Coalition at that time. I went home.

Knarr: Can you describe how the Coalition Forces treated the Iraqis at that time?

Ahmad: Yes. During that time, especially in '04 when there were a lot of terrorists inside the city, there was nothing really happening between the Coalition Forces and us. But the Coalition's raids went really bad, because they Coalition Forces thought everybody was against them.

That was still '04. In '05, Al Qaeda took over the city and took over all Al Anbar. They [Al Qaeda] started killing people, cutting off heads, and this city became a ghost city. The Coalition Forces were outside the city. They never got involved with what happened inside the city.

Knarr: Can you talk about Al Qaeda's brutality? Can you provide any examples?

Ahmad: There are a lot of examples. A lot of my friends were killed by having their heads cut off. It's like you wake up early in the morning and you go down the street, and you see four or five dead bodies with their own heads over their bodies. Three of my cousins were killed that way. Sometimes we received only the heads and couldn't find the bodies. Sometimes we found only the head and the body had been tossed in the desert or in the river. On May 2, 2005, Major Ahmad, one of my cousins, died that way. The Albu-Mahal tribe began to revolt against the terrorists. [7:19] Major Ahmad. He was the Iraqi Police [IP] Chief over here.

Knarr: He had the same first name as you?

Ahmad: Yes.

Knarr: Okay. So, 2 May Major Ahmad was killed, and then you revolted against the terrorists?

Ahmad: Yes, Sir.

Knarr: Where did that happen? Was he in his IP station?

Ahmad: There was a group of seven people. Seven terrorists were on the main road. They trapped, shot, and killed him. From that day, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Albu-Mahal tribe started

fighting the terrorists. There was a battle that lasted from May 2 to May 9 when we kicked out all of the terrorists from Husaybah, from the city of Al Qaim.<sup>1</sup> After that, we pushed the terrorists back to Karabilah. There were a lot of mortars and fighting, and a lot of rockets launched. [9:50]

Knarr: Did the people in Karabilah support Al Qaeda?

Ahmad: I don't want to say that all the people in Karabilah helped and supported them, but I can say that at least 80 percent of the people of Karabilah helped and supported them. [11:20]

Knarr: What tribe is there?

Ahmad: Karbuli.

Knarr: I understand that when Al Qaeda came in they also forced marriages with the Karbuli Tribe. Is that true?

Ahmad: Yes, but not in Karabilah area—that happened in Rummanah.

Knarr: Please explain.

Ahmad: In general, all the people [Al Qaeda] who used to run this place were called *emirs*. Emir means *prince*. This prince is the main leader. He would be a foreigner. [For example,] When he's moving around Rummanah, and he sees beautiful girl, he may ask her to marry him. The parents don't have any choice, because if they refuse they will be dead. So they let her marry this emir or prince. They're all foreigners; they're all Arabs. [13:10]

Knarr: Do you remember any of the emirs' names?

Ahmad: Of course, no one knows what their real names are, but they do have nicknames, like Albu Hadija, which is a really old name going back to Mohammed's time.

Knarr: So they knew it was a fake name?

Ahmad: Yes.

Knarr: Now, on 2 through 9 May, you kicked Al Qaeda out or you moved them east to Karabilah. What happened next? [15:16]

Ahmad: After we pushed all the terrorists to Karabilah, we started opening all the service facilities like the sewage, infrastructure, mail, and courthouse facilities. We started patrol-

<sup>1</sup> Many of those we interviewed referred to Husaybah as the City of Al Qaim.

ling to protect the area because we were afraid that infiltrators would attack those facilities. We start running and ruling the city and trying to get it back to normal. The terrorists went to staging in Karabilah and Rummanah. They then withdrew to Rawah.

After that, we told the Minister of Defense for the Iraq Government that we needed help and support from the Iraqi Army (IA). Because we were just like militias, we were running around without any rules. The government made empty promises. They did not help us. They told us they were going to send an IA brigade to help and support us, but no one showed up. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2005, we discovered that the Al Qaim area was surrounded on three different sides by masses of Al Qaeda members. They were marching from the east, from Karabilah. North of river they came from Rummanah, and they were in boats from the Al Sunjic [phonetic] area. Unfortunately, the people who lived on the western side of Husaybah, the Salmani Tribe, helped them [Al Qaeda.] They conspired and fought with the terrorists against the Albu-Mahal Tribe. The battle lasted six days and we lost a lot of people. We spent all our ammo, so we were forced to move to the middle of the desert to Akashat. [19:54]

Knarr: So they were coming from Karabilah in the east, and across the river from Rummanah in the north. They had Salmani on the west side next to the Husaybah border. Does this mean the only place that was open was to the south?

[Ahmed's response was "yes," but then we began discussing red-on-red.]

Knarr: And in fact, Sheikh Kurdi asked the question, *Why did the other [Coalition] units allow this battle to happen and not help the Albu-Mahal fight Al Qaeda?* They [the Albu Mahal] have fought the Coalition, so they considered them red. And of course, Al Qaeda was red, and Salmani was red. So, that was probably one of the reasons why Mundy didn't help.

Colonel Dale Alford: When I got here in August, I wanted to find out who was fighting who so I could support the good side.

Ahmad: Frankly, yes. Albu-Mahal was fighting the Coalition Forces as they showed up here. After the terrorists or the terrorist militias started to take over the place, we started seeing a lot of killing, a lot of innocent people dying, and heads getting cut off. We shifted from fighting the Coalition Forces to fighting all the terrorists. [24:20]

Alford: And that's the Sahawa. They came to realize that. We were "infidels," but these guys were worse. Also, the US Forces had an Awakening when I got here. We realized that we



were treating the Iraqis bad. We realized we had to side with the tribes, because the tribes were the answer. And that's when we started to figure out who was who. [25:42]

Ahmad: After we moved to the desert, to the Akashat area, I travelled to Baghdad to meet with Mr. Sa'dun Dulaymi, the Minister of Defense. After we left Akashat, the bad guys blew up all of our houses. The people who couldn't move to Akashat were being killed. There were eight guys from the Albu-Mahal tribe that no one knows where their bodies are. Also, Al Qaeda kidnapped a lot of old people and tortured them, because they were from the Albu-Mahal tribe. One of these old guys was my father. He was more than 73 years old and because I am his son, they took out one of his eyes. He is still alive today as a witness.

Knarr: It sounds like Al Qaeda took revenge on the entire tribe. How many people went to Akashat?

Ahmad: A lot. Everybody who used to live in this area moved to Akashat. Families, kids, women. Everybody moved to Akashat.

Knarr: One thousand or two thousand?

Ahmad: Less than 2,000. Akashat is a very small city. The city couldn't handle all those people moving in, so that's why some of them moved to Ramadi.<sup>2</sup> Some moved outside Iraq, to Jordan and Syria. Those who couldn't afford to go to those places, went to Akashat.

Knarr: Did they have friends in Akashat? Were there other members of the tribe there, or was there another tribe there to help them?

Ahmad: Yes, our own relatives. There are a lot of Albu-Mahal tribe members living in Akashat, so they hosted us.

Knarr: And then after you got to Akashat, you went to Baghdad to speak to the Minister of Defense. Did he help you? And what did you do next?

Ahmad: Minister Sa'dun Dulaymi asked me for a list of names of Albu-Mahal tribe members to let join the Iraqi Army. Yes, and of course with the help of the Coalition Forces, they [the Coalition Forces and IA] sent some kind of team, from Baghdad to Akashat to test those tribe members and give them physicals to determine if they were qualified to join. They approved 279 of them and named the unit the Desert Protection Force. (32:15)

<sup>2</sup> Some found refuge with the Albu-Mahal and Albu-Soda tribal contingents east of Ramadi City in the Shark Fin area to the east of Ramadi..

Knarr: Did you join at that time?

Ahmad: Yes, I was the commander of the unit. And at that time, there were 89 individuals. They went to work with Major Mukhlis, and they were trained by the American Special Forces. They trained them at the Fallujah Camp. After that they were sent to Al Qaim, and they joined Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in Al Qaim.

Knarr: Okay, so 279 were approved to be in the Iraqi Army, and they became the Desert Protectors? Were there another 89 that Major Mukhlis took with him to Fallujah to be trained by the Iraqi Special Operations Forces?

Ahmad: The 89 were from the 279.

Knarr: So, that left 190 in Akashat. Did you go with them?

Ahmad: No, I didn't go to Fallujah, because they wanted a Major to be with them. That's why they sent Major Mukhlis.

Knarr: Who was the American Special Forces soldier that went with them?

Ahmad: Captain Joe. He's originally Irish, so he's the one who trained the 89. [35:29]

Knarr: And then what did the 89 do?

Ahmad: After that they returned to the Al Qaim area and operated here [Al Qaim] with Colonel Alford.

Knarr: So the 89 came back, joined up with the 190, and they had 279 now in the Desert Protectors?

Ahmad: Yes, 192 guys stayed in Akashat.<sup>3</sup> I would visit the 89 guys every once in a while. I asked the higher-ups to let the 192 guys join the Operation or go to train in Ramana [north of the Euphrates from Husaybah], join the 28<sup>th</sup> IA Brigade, and officially let them join the IA. After that [after the operations], the Minister of Defense approved those 192 to join the 3<sup>rd</sup> IA Brigade in this area, which became the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

Knarr: Let's go back to the development of the Desert Protectors. I need to understand how they were organized and what they did as Desert Protectors before they joined the army.

Ahmad: They [the 192] only stayed in Akashat before they moved back to Al Qaim. During Operation STEEL CURTAIN they stayed in Akashat and secured it. Only the 89 went to STEEL CURTAIN.

<sup>3</sup> It was unclear where the other two people came from.

After they let the 192 individuals join the army, an order came from the Minister of Defense. He told me that I should be the commander of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which was then the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion.

Knarr: So the 192, who were still in Akashat, did not fight in STEEL CURTAIN. You were the commander. Did you fight in STEEL CURTAIN?

Ahmad: No.

Knarr: Okay, but this whole group of 279 were called the Desert Protectors.

Ahmad: Yes, the 89 were trained by the US Forces, and they joined Operation STEEL CURTAIN.

Interpreter: Do you want me to brief you again about what happened?

Knarr: Yes please.

Interpreter: Of the 279, 89 were sent to Fallujah to be trained by the US Special Forces. Those 89 returned to Al Qaim to join in Operation STEEL CURTAIN. The 192 individuals from the Desert Protection Force stayed in Akashat. They secured Akashat and stabilized it with checkpoints on the main road. They remained there to protect the city of Akashat during Operation STEEL CURTAIN. Then after Operation STEEL CURTAIN, they ordered the 192 individuals to go and join the army, and the 89 also stayed as Special Forces. [40:56]

Alford: Did they join the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion?

Interpreter: They were the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion.

Alford: Did you command the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion?

Ahmad: Yes, after that we trained in the Hamania [spelling] area. We joined the operation there, and I became the commander. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade used to be in the Hamania area, so that's why a lot of the Desert Protectors who came from Haminia joined the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade. I became the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, which is now the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>4</sup> So to clear up the confusion, they called it the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 7<sup>th</sup> Division.

Knarr: So, how did the Desert Protectors get that name? Did they ever fight as the Desert Protectors?

<sup>4</sup> There was a lot of discussion in the following few minutes about the evolution of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, which was then reflagged as the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade when the Iraqi Army decided that they wanted distinct names for each of their brigades. They didn't want ten 3<sup>rd</sup> IA Brigades, one for each division; they wanted to be able to say, "the 28<sup>th</sup> IA Brigade," and everyone would know it was the part of the 7<sup>th</sup> IA Division in Al Anbar.

Ahmad: There's no particular reason for the name *Desert Protection Force*. Mr. Sa'dun Dulaymi just chose it. You can ask Mr. Sa'dun why we call it the Desert Protection Force.<sup>5</sup> He didn't name it after a really a big battle that happened in the middle of the desert.

Knarr: Is that primarily because of the work in Akashat which is a desert area? [50:57]

Ahmad: Maybe. You can also ask Mr. Sa'dun Dulaymi about it. Most people know that most of the land here is desert, so he could have picked it for that reason.

Knarr: That makes sense. So, when was the first fight you had as the battalion commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade or now called the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade? When did you first fight with the Coalition?

Ahmad: I became a commander on 30 January 2006, and from then until 17 October 2007, my unit operated with US Forces. [After] that, I quit the army.

Knarr: You commanded the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion during that period?

Ahmad: Yes.

Alford: Ismael was your commander.

Ahmad: Yes.

Knarr: So what did you do after October 2007?

Ahmad: I stayed at home, no job, nothing to do.

Knarr: Why did you stop in 2007? Why did you no longer work as a battalion commander?

Ahmad: As the Mayor said before, everybody that fought Al Qaeda was just put aside and accused of being a terrorist. Just like Major Mukhlis, the one who led the 89 guys. He was also accused of being a terrorist and was terminated from the IA. Thank God he was only terminated and not arrested. I was accused of cooperating with terrorists and allowing them to infiltrate Iraq from Syria. However, I did not support the terrorists, I didn't give them money. And I was not responsible for the VBIEDs [vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices], the suicide bombers, and all the planting of IEDs. I was not responsible for it. Iraqi Intelligence reported these accusations against me to the Minister of Defense. So we felt let down, because the people who were being accused of being the bad guys were the people who fought the terrorists from '05 to '07.

Knarr: Will you be accepted back in the army?

<sup>5</sup> See interview transcript for Dr. Sa'dun.

Ahmad: Yes. I returned to the Iraqi Army, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion a week ago, but I don't have a position. Right now I am waiting for the new government to be legal and after that I will take my position.<sup>6</sup>

Knarr: Since the objective of this project is to support training and education for officers and NCOs, what lessons do you want us to relay to them?

Ahmad: I would like to tell all of the officers and members of the US Military Forces and also the people of United States to please focus and distinguish between Islam and the terrorists. The Islamic religion does not sanction the terrorists' actions. Since the days of our prophet Mohammad, cutting off heads and brutal killings have not been permitted. We don't have anything like this in Islam.

Unfortunately, the terrorists believe there's one God and the law and all that stuff, but that presents Islam poorly. The main message is that Islam is the religion of peace, the religion of the merciful, the religion of love, the religion of everything good. I want to send the message about Islam that Islam is far from what the terrorists were doing. And also, a big thank you to all the Coalition Forces that helped, supported, and provided security to this area. Thank God that you guys saw at the market [all of the] progress [that has] happened.<sup>7</sup>

Knarr: The policy when you joined the army was that you could be sent anywhere, but you were allowed to remain here. How did you know that you would be allowed to stay in Al Qaim after you joined?

Ahmad: I didn't know I was going to work in Al Qaim, but I was wishing I would. I wanted to work here in Al Qaim, because I knew everything about the area. There's a captain working in the Ministry of Defense whose name is Captain Hill, the one who suggested that the 192 individuals join the Iraqi Army. He wanted most of the same guys, when they were done with their training, to come back over here and work and serve in this same area.

Knarr: So Captain Hill was an American, and he was working in the Ministry of Defense. Was he a liaison or a transition guy?

Ahmad: MNSTCI

Knarr: MNSTCI, Multinational Training and Security Command Iraq.

<sup>6</sup> This was after the March 2010 elections; the new government had not yet been formed.

<sup>7</sup> The JAWP team walked through the Husaybah marketplace without Kevlar and body armor.

Ahmad: Yes, I don't know what his real position is.

Knarr: Thank you for taking the time to talk to us and providing the details. I apologize for all of the questions, but I need to make sure that I tell the story accurately. In many cases it's my ignorance that I'm trying to overcome.

Ahmad: Thank you also for the great opportunity. This is going to be good for the future. Are you going to talk to Sheikh Ahmed Albu-Risha?

[The continuing discussion is from the audio recording; the video taping was stopped right before this conversation].

Knarr: Yes, on Tuesday.

Ahmed: When you see Sheikh Ahmed, ask him, "Did the Awakening group start from Al Qaim or from his area?"

19 May 2010

Subject: Interview with sBG Ismael Sha Hamid Dulaymi, Commander, Former Commander 28<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Brigade, 7<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division

sBG Ismael Sha Hamid Dulaymi, currently the Commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division (IAD), commanded the 28<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Brigade, 7<sup>th</sup> IAD during late 2005–March 2008 in Al Qaim. His brigade worked with Coalition Forces in the Al Qaim area and was responsible for establishing security from the Iraqi/Syrian border east to Anah and Rawah. Because he spent almost three years in the Al Qaim district and

worked with five different Marine battalions that rotated in and out of Al Qaim, he provides a fascinating chronology of events that reflects continuous improvement throughout the region that occurred during his tenure as brigade commander. As a cousin of Sheikh Sabah, his relationship with the tribes contributed to his success.

On 15 April 2010 sBG Ismael was interviewed at his office in Al Asad Air Base by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, USMC, LtCol Dave Graves, USMC. An interpreter was used for the interview. The following is the transcript from that interview.



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Dr. Bill Knarr: Please provide your name and background. [4:13]

sBG Ismael Sha Hamid Dulaymi: In the name of God most gracious, most merciful, my name is Ismael Sha Hamid Dulaymi. I live in Al Anbar Province, and specifically in the Al Qaim area. I was born on 1 August 1963. I finished high school in the Al Qaim area. On October 1982, I joined the Military Academy in Baghdad. I graduated in 1984 with the rank of second lieutenant. I'm married and I have four kids, two girls and two boys. I joined the first Iraqi/Iranian War when I was a lieutenant, and I was working in the headquarters staff in the infantry corps. In 1987, I was promoted to first lieutenant, and I worked as a company commander. In 1990, I was promoted to captain, and I was an instructor in one of the training institutions in Hit. On 15 February 1992, I attended the Joint Staff College, and I graduated in 1994 with the rank of staff major. I worked as the operations officer with the Border Brigade with Saudi Arabia. In August 1996, I was the deputy commander for two years. Beginning in August 1998, I was the battalion com-

mander as a lieutenant colonel in the 16<sup>th</sup> Division of the Iraqi Army. I was the battalion commander for three years.

On 11 September 2001, which you call the Black Day, I was transferred to the position of XO of the 38<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. I was promoted and took many positions in the Iraqi Army until 2003 when the Coalition came to Iraq. I stayed at home without any work for two years and three months during which time I observed what was happening in Iraq. In 2004, I lived in Mosul. At one point, American troops checked the neighborhoods for weapons. When they came to my house, they found my military uniform—I was a staff colonel—so they respected me and asked, “Why don’t you join the new Army that has just been established?” “I’m not convinced of the quality of this newly formed Army,” I replied. “I’m not convinced of the quality because of all the persons that the Coalition has gathered from the street to create this new Iraqi Army. You collected them from the streets, promoted them, and gave them officer ranks that they did not deserve.” But after the Ministry of Defense was established, I looked forward to joining the new Iraqi Army because the new division [7<sup>th</sup> IAD] was being established. [11:21]

In Al Qaim in 2004, the Coalition started to establish the local government, the Iraqi Police, and the Border Command as a form of authority inside the area. As you know, Al Qaeda had infiltrated the entire area, including the security systems. In 2005, Al Qaeda destroyed everything, which left a huge gap in Anbar Province’s security. There were American Forces in Al Qaim then, but they were not in control of the situation.

Knarr: How did the insurgency then develop? [13:18]

Ismael: As I said earlier, the Coalition Forces depended mostly on the Iraqi Police, the border forces, and the local authorities that they had established. Al Qaeda had a lot of influence inside these forces, which is why they [IPs, border forces and local authorities] did not operate professionally. The Coalition Forces had not built relationships with the tribe’s Sheikh or the local population, and that adversely affected security. The fighters who came through the borders—those we called *Mujahadeen*—had influence. They had influence because they had relationships with all the people in Al Anbar.

Everything after 2003 collapsed, because there was no government, no authority of any kind. But the tribes kept their organization and strength by bonding with each other.

After Al Qaeda infiltrated the population, they started assassinating all the key leaders and sons of key people. And as you know, Al Qaeda began killing people in strange ways like beheading and using different kinds of torture. We saw a lot of bodies all over the place.



This angered the people, that these militants were there under the cover of religious Jihad, so the sheikhs recognized that this was a conspiracy against the Iraqi people.

Those who participated—the foreign fighters who infiltrated the population—whether they were from Syria or other Arab countries, were the lowest kind of people in Iraq. All of these tribal leaders tried to join together to fight the terrorists and kick them out. The Albu-Mahal tribe, one of the biggest tribes in the area, negotiated with Al Qaeda's key leaders from Saudi Arabia or Algeria. They negotiated with them to try to solve the security problem in Al Anbar Province. [19:22]

Knarr: When was this?

Ismael: Spring or summer 2005. Al Qaeda asked for a list of tribal members they [Al Qaeda] should force out of Al Anbar, but the Sheikhs refused to provide the names and other conditions that Al Qaeda tried to impose. They refused because of the strong bond that existed among the tribes.

Those terrorist members or leaders then issued orders to assassinate all the key personnel in the area—religious figures, key people in the local government, school teachers, engineers, officers, and others. They had a long list, and they started going through the list. One of the people assassinated was Major Ahmed; he served on the Iraqi Police. This assassination triggered the first part of the war against terrorism in Al Anbar Province, especially against those members of Al Qaeda. The Albu-Mahal tribe fought back and killed four members of Al Qaeda as retribution for Major Ahmed's death. That's how the fight between the Albu-Mahal tribe and Al Qaeda in Al-Anbar Province began. Albu-Mahal won the first battle against terrorism in Al Anbar. They raided Al Qaeda's locations, captured a lot of weapons and ammunitions, and arrested a lot of Al Qaeda members then.

Col Alford: Was this Hamza?

Ismael: They [Albu-Mahal] were the Hamza Militia. [23:12] One of Albu-Mahal tribesman was assigned to the position of the governor of Al Anbar Province. He was initially the mayor of Al Qaim, and he was promoted to be the governor of Al Anbar Province. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2005, he was going to work and members of Al Qaeda kidnapped him on the highway. This made the situation worse and a big fight began in the area.

Knarr: Who was the Albu-Mahal tribesman who was made governor?

Ismael: The engineer, Faja Nawaf. There were negotiations to release him. Al Qaeda's leaders demanded very severe conditions for his release.

Knarr: What were those conditions?

Ismael: They asked for the return of the weapons and the ammunitions that the Albu-Mahal had taken. They also asked for the return of the Al Qaeda members that Albu-Mahal had arrested. In addition, they asked the Sheikh [Sheikh Sabah] of the Albu-Mahal tribe to step down as the leader of the Albu-Mahal tribe. This was unacceptable under our traditions. [26:08]

In June, July, and August of the same year, there was a short truce, but throughout these months, Al Qaeda was preparing to fight the Albu-Mahal tribe and get back what had been taken.

In September 2005, Al Qaeda attacked Al Qaim and Al Ubaydi. This battle lasted for two weeks. Al Qaeda won. The Albu-Mahal tribe evacuated to the Akashat area. Al Qaeda members managed to get inside Sheikh Sabah's house and blew it up. Sheikh Sabah fled to Jordan and the rest of his family fled to Syria. At the time, I was negotiating with the Ministry of Defense and trying to get back to the Iraqi Army. It's a coincidence that I became the brigade commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, which was just established at An Numaniyah Base [60 miles southeast of Baghdad].

Knarr: Were there other tribes working with or against Albu-Mahal?

Ismael: Two tribes, Albu-Ubayd and Albu-Salman, supported the Albu-Mahal. The Albu-Ubayd tribe is north of the river, in the Ramana area.

Alford: But not Karbulis? Albu-Karbuli worked with Al Qaeda?

Ismael: Al-Karabilah tribe members worked with Al Qaeda, but the Sheikhs of the Al-Karabilah were not against the Albu-Mahal; they had no control of their tribes.

On 8 October 2005, I arrived at the An Numaniyah Base to take my new position as brigade commander. The first advisor who worked with me in that brigade was [Lieutenant] Colonel Martino. When they found out I was from the Albu-Mahal tribe and the cousin of Sheikh Sabah, I got their attention. Some of the Marine leaders visited me. I remember one of them, General Williams. We were talking in detail about the Al Qaim situation. They told me that they were preparing to attack Al Qaeda in the Al Qaim area with the help of the Iraqi Army. One of the generals said, "We will get the situation in Al Qaim under control. But will you guarantee that Albu-Mahal will not fight the Marines when they are there?" I told them, "I cannot promise that unless I discuss it with Sheikh Sabah who is the tribe's leader and get the word from him." So Sheikh Sabah told me,

“You are authorized as a military person and as a person from the Albu-Mahal tribe. You are authorized from both sides to do whatever needs to be done to gain control of the situation for the safety of all Albu-Mahal tribe.” So Colonel Martino told me that the arrangements and preparations were made for that attack in the Al Qaim area, and that it would happen soon.

The Marines had a lot of contacts through the Albu-Mahal tribe to gain the local population’s support. They had taken some of the youth from the tribe in the Akashat area, about 89 people, with a Major Mukhlis and established the Desert Protection Force, which they used to help the Marines in their battle against Al Qaeda.

Knarr: When was this?

Ismael: They started training maybe August or September of 2005 in Habbaniyah. [35:53] As you know, training and preparing the brigade took more than three months at An Numaniyah Base. I had hoped the brigade would be ready in time to participate in that battle against Al Qaeda, but the Marines told me that the situation was critical and they needed to act quickly. They told me that the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was moved to the Al Qaim area with Colonel Alford’s battalion to start that battle, which was called STEEL CURTAIN.

So the Marines and the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division entered Karabilah and secured positions in preparation for the big battle. The troops were spread from the borders east to Ubaydi—about 25 kilometers. During that battle they destroyed the bridges along the Euphrates.

In early 2006, my brigade completed its preparations and moved to the Al Qaim area. [We discussed the location of An Numaniyah which is located near Kut, southeast of Baghdad.]

Knarr: Where did your Jundi [Iraqi police] come from? Did they come from the Al Qaim area or were they from all over Iraq? [40:15]

Ismael: Most of the soldiers in my brigade were from Baghdad and the southern provinces. Some were from the northern provinces.

I contacted the Marines about the Desert Protection Force. I asked for 120 soldiers from their fighters to join my brigade because they had expertise from fighting that battle. As you know, those 120 personnel from that force were from the Albu-Mahal tribe. They were eager to fight Al Qaeda because they fought Al Qaeda before. I distributed those

120 within my brigade down to the squad level, so each squad had at least one soldier from the Al Qaim area. I spread that whole force within the brigade, because they knew the area well.

Alford: Did more Albu-Mahal join the brigade that spring after you arrived?

Ismael: After moving to Al Qaim, my whole brigade spread north and south of the Euphrates in the Al Qaim area and a lot of Albu-Mahal joined my brigade. We started operations on 15 February 2006. The first thing we did was establish a police force. We tried to represent all the tribes on the force, but we saw very few of the other tribes, especially the Albu-Karbuli tribe. The majority of the recruits were from Albu-Mahal because the terrorists were still active in the area. When we were deploying, Al Qaeda attacked the Belleau Wood checkpoint with a VBIED [Vehicle Born Improvised Explosive Device]. This injured several soldiers including twelve Marines, three or five soldiers, and three civilians. Al Qaeda planted a lot of IEDs and fired mortars. They attacked military locations. That gave Iraqis the feeling that Al Qaeda was coming back to fight there.

On 26 February in 2006, all the tribal leaders in the area got together. Colonel Alford, the Mayor of Al Qaim, Mayor Farhan, and the police director were also there. It was a coincidence that the police director happened to be my brother, so we had a strong bond between us as we established the police force. [47:34]

Knarr: What is your brother's name?

Ismael: Jamal, Colonel Jamal. At that conference I introduced myself as the new brigade commander and the military leader of the area. The Sheikhs were happy because they knew me.

I asked all the Sheikhs a simple question: "Are you with me or with Al Qaeda? Whoever is not with me, is with Al Qaeda." I told them that "I know every one of you. I even know how many of you have helped the foreign fighters, kept them in your house, fed them. I know you well. Don't try to deceive me. Remember that whoever dies will never come back to life again unless God orders it. Saddam Hussein and his regime will never be back unless there is a miracle. And, as long as I'm the military commander of Al Qaim, I will never allow Al Qaeda to come back here. We are the new Iraqi Army. We are not the National Guard that Al Qaeda found an easy target. I have professional and capable battalion commanders who will fight."

I managed to get Colonel Ahmed, the Desert Protection Force commander, assigned to my unit. I assigned him the mission of securing Husaybah and Karabilah, which were the most dangerous areas. It was Al Qaeda's safe house, especially the Al-Karabilah area. After a month or two, Colonel Alford ended his mission in Iraq and returned to the States. New Marine troops came with Colonel Marano. [1/7 Marines, Mar–Sept 2006, 52:38]

Colonel Alford established a lot of secure and well-designed bases in the area. So when Colonel Marano came the security situation had improved and Al Qaeda started to weaken.

We then opened the doors for the local youth to enlist in the new Army. We started training courses in Habbaniyah. We sent them there to train, and we got them back and reinforced our brigade with them. We managed to defeat Al Qaeda in Salman, Karabilah, Al Ubaydi, and Al Qaim. Then Al Qaeda went to Rawah, so the Marines asked me to start joint operations to push one of my battalions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, to Rawah and Anah.

On September 2006, the battalion moved to Rawah. The distance between Rawah/Anah, and Al Qaim is about 100 kilometers, which made it a good place for the terrorists to hide. Once again, Al Qaeda members started attacking all the troops in the area; they tried to cut supply lines, preventing fuel, food, electric supplies, anything from being delivered to these areas. We realized we had to go east to control these areas and the gaps between them. I received great support from the Marines. They helped me in ways I couldn't have imagined. Whatever I asked for, they provided: weapons, vehicles, trucks, HMMWVs [High Mobility Wheeled Vehicles], and logistical support. Everything we asked for, they were ready to give. At the same time, our soldiers were training daily.

I told Colonel Marano, "Colonel Alford established a lot of military bases throughout the area, so what are you going to do to support us?" He said, "Let's do some field recon[naissance]." We chose the Al Madi [phonetic] area. The field engineers established that area as Vera Cruz Battle Position and we manned it with a platoon from the Marines and a company from the brigade. That location is [59:44] southeast of the Al Qaim area. It's on the highway that joins Al Qaim with Ramadi.

I recall we were in a joint convoy with Colonel Marano, and we came across IEDs that had been planted, but had exploded before we got there. When we arrived, we found that the terrorists had blown themselves up.

After we had established that location, Al Qaeda moved north of the river and prevented us from crossing the Euphrates River with bullets and IEDs. They attacked the bases

with mortars three or four times a week from their positions north of the Euphrates. We realized we needed to take a position north of the river to control the area and prevent those attacks. [1:02:43]

After six months, Colonel Marano ended his mission and a new battalion came in the area. Colonel Schuster [3/4 Marines, Sept 2006–Mar 2007] was in charge of that battalion. I started working with him closely, in the same spirit that I worked with the previous Marines. I asked him the same question, “Colonel Alford established a lot of military bases in Al Qaim, area and Colonel Marano established the base in Vera Cruz. What will you provide?” He said, “What do you want?” I told him “I need to develop my area of operations north of the river and to prevent attacks against our bases.” He agreed and started building [Battle Position] Denning in the in Al-Adair [phonetic] area.

We conducted a lot of operations along the Euphrates area between Al Qaim, Ubaydi and [1:03:31] Adair to clear out the terrorists. We succeeded and managed to enlist a lot of people from these areas into the police and army. I told Colonel Schuster, “We are going to work in areas that have never seen anything like this [Coalition and Iraqi security positions in their area]. We are going in and we have to find a way to convince them to join the security forces.”

We started chasing Al Qaeda members from village to village, from farm to farm—we followed them wherever they went. At one meeting I told Colonel Schuster “Our troops are moving, and the Al Qaeda members are moving also, but we have established a strong base in the population of this area. We need to gain their trust and keep them on our side to prevent them from supporting the terrorists.” He asked me, “What do you suggest?” I told him, “We can provide them what they want: reconstruction, schools, clinics, any supplies they need, power, water, or anything that can help them improve their situation. Then they will see we are helping them and we will gain their trust and there will be no place for terrorists to hide in the area.” The 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion had a lot of success with the Marines in Anah and Rawah, but there were still areas in between like Jibab Valley that was also controlled by Al Qaeda members. It’s about 60 kilometers east of the Al Qaim area.

After Colonel Schuster ended his mission, a new commander came and replaced him. He was Lieutenant Colonel Jason Bohm [1/4 Marines, March to November 2007]. So I asked him the same question I had asked every commander. I told him, “I need a location in Jibab Valley, 60 kilometers east of Al Qaim, so I can control the area.” I told him in the

meeting that night, “I need this location,” and I pointed out on the map. The second day he came at night and told me, “I reconned that site, and it is perfect.” It was a strategic location that controls the whole area. The field engineers built the camp quickly. An infantry company from my brigade and a Marine platoon were sent there. They established communications with all the convoys going between Rawah and Al Qaim. [1:11:10]

Knarr: What did they name this new combat outpost that was in Jibab Valley?

Ismael: It was called Jibab COP [Combat Outpost].

So all the terrorists were pushed into a small area between Al Qaim and Rawah.

We held a big conference with all the tribal leaders in the area so we could develop relationships between the people and the troops. We gained their trust and we met a lot of people whose hands were not fully [unintelligible 1:12:35]. Those fighters and those who only provided a small amount of support to Al Qaeda and now wanted to support us went to the police station and made a commitment that they would not support Al Qaeda and they would be good citizens.

Every Saturday we had a security meeting to discuss the files of the people who switched to our side. We discussed their situation and whether they were acceptable or not. The Marines, Army, police, and mayor were present at those meetings. We categorized the files into one of three colors: red for high risk people; yellow or orange were a risk, but we thought they could be on our side; and green for those with small problems but who were allowed to join our forces. Whoever had a green file could easily join the police or the army.

The people with yellow files would be under surveillance and observation for six months to establish their good intent. If they engaged in no criminal activities during that time, we could move them into the green category. We gathered all the red files, located the people, and minimized their numbers to an amount we could control in the area.

At the time, Lieutenant Colonel Bohm and I began to reestablish Al Qaim’s point of entry. There were a lot of construction projects and we employed workers from the local areas. This benefitted the people and improved the area. We reduced the number of unemployed workers and completed a number of projects with money from the Marines.

Once again, we began to reconstruct and build those bridges destroyed during Operation STEEL CURTAIN, and re-connected both sides of area. We positioned check points on either side of the bridges. At the time of Colonel Alford, one of the Sheikhs asked me,

“When will you build that bridge?” I told him, “Once you are all joined together and helping to prevent the terrorists from getting into your cities. We can’t build the bridge now because the terrorists use it to fight back. We will not build that bridge until you all join together in one hand to fight the terrorists.” [1:19:12]

When all the Sheikhs asked for reconstruction projects to rebuild the destroyed areas of the cities, we told them, “Help us, so we can help you. Help us identify Al Qaeda members and their activities. Let us know what they are doing. We will control them, so we can begin to rebuild.” Some of Sheikhs were afraid of Al Qaeda, because of its strong influence in the area. They hesitated, but after a while, they started to respond.

Security gradually improved. People’s finances started improving. The Iraqi people there felt safe again when they saw all these bases around them securing the area and preventing the terrorists from coming in. In the middle of 2007, Al Qaeda lost hope of ever coming back into Al-Anbar Province.

Once Lieutenant Colonel Bohm’s mission ended, another commander, Lieutenant Colonel Baumgarten [3/2 Marines, November 2007 – June 2008], came in. We started joint operations again. I asked him the same question: “Everyone has provided me with bases. What can you provide? I have a small area still not controlled by us, which is west of Rawah and north of the Euphrates.” He asked me, “Where do you want us to locate a position?” So I told him, “In Al Samsiyah location.” We started building the Samsiyah base, and it was occupied by an Iraqi company from the brigade and a Marine platoon. With that location we closed the gap between Rawah and Anah—a big area. We also closed the link between the west of the Euphrates area and the north. We prevented any infiltration or coordination between these areas. When we had finished clearing all the areas, we started spreading our operations to the north. With our convoys, we started clearing areas 80 kilometers north of the Euphrates, and 120 kilometers south in the direction of Akashat. [1:24:37]

I left the AO in March 2008. Colonel Chris had replaced Lieutenant Colonel Baumgarten. I met him outside our office. He asked me, “If you were commander of the area, where would you want the next battle position located?” I told him, “Wherever the terrorists are operating. I would defeat them one by one and follow them wherever they go.” Although 2006 and 2007 were risky and dangerous for us, we have a lot of good memories.

After two years of fighting, Al Qaeda’s rule ended in Anbar Province. I was transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> division, west of Mosul, but I still went back and forth to my original location



in Al Qaim. Unfortunately, when I got back to the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, I found that most of the Marine commanders had left since MNF-W [Multi-National Force West] left the area.

I can remember every single advisor I've worked with starting with Colonel Martino, Lieutenant Colonel Connie Zuro, and Lieutenant Colonel [Paul] Lampadine. We had a lot of arguments with Lieutenant Colonel Labadie about our work. We had a lot of arguments and we shouted at each other, but we still became friends. After that Colonel Thomson and the final advisor was Lieutenant Colonel Gridley; he's my brother. When I returned to Al Qaim with my family, I invited him several times. He came, and we had lunch together and talked about the old days. We couldn't have that kind of success with the Marines unless there was mutual respect and trust between us and joint coordination and planning. So we sat together for hours and hours and discussed our plans and next steps in detail.

The only thing I want to ask the commanders who worked with me from the Marines is why, when I asked them to open a new location or a new base, did they accept happily?  
[1:30:44]

Knarr: I imagine because they trusted your judgment.

Ismael: This is true! Also, because I'm a military person and I work with high professional expectations. I left my brigade and it was categorized as the best brigade in the 7<sup>th</sup> division with all the things I have heard from them, whether from the Marines or the Iraqi Army.

Knarr: I have a question. In 2005, the Iraqi Army's policy was that you could join the Army, but you didn't know where you were going to go. You managed to have people from Al Qaim assigned to your brigade, and you guaranteed them some time in their home. How did you do that?

Ismael: First, they know me as a person, as one of Albu-Mahal tribe, and also the cousin of Sheikh Sabah, which is the tribe's Sheikh. Also they knew my father. He was a respected person in the tribe, and they always consulted him about problems in the tribe. Also, my brother, Colonel Jamal, was the Police Director. We were known people, known that we only worked for the sake of the people. We didn't receive any personal benefits from our work. We need to serve everyone well, decently, and respectfully. So, when we tried to recruit the young people of these areas to the security forces, we tried to recruit from every tribe in the area. [1:34:45]

Knarr: How could you keep them though? I understood the policy was if you were up north, they could send you down south. If you were in the west, they could send you to the east, but you were able to guarantee people would stay in their area, their own town. How did you do that? It was a rule from up above. You changed that.

Ismael: I had an agreement with the Marines that all the people who were enlisted from these areas should work at least one year in my brigade. At the time, sectarian violence was rampant and killing based on your identity was common, so I couldn't afford to lose any people to another unit, another province. That's why I had that agreement with the Marines, to keep all the personnel who were enlisted in this area.

Knarr: You mentioned that Colonel Ahmed started the Desert Protectors, is Colonel Ahmed around?

Ismael: He resigned earlier from the Army, but I think he's trying to rejoin. He's now in Husaybah. Sheikh Kurdi can find him for you. Also, Major Mukhlis, he was the Special Forces Commander at that time. I managed to recruit him into my unit.

Knarr: This is a tremendous story. Thank you.

Ismael: It is just a summary of what happened. I didn't talk about a lot of the combat or the battles with Al Qaeda. One of the emirs was an Egyptian; he was in the Al Qaim area. He said, "I have cut off all the people's supplies. The only thing left for them is breathing and drinking water." They had a unit in the area that robbed and kidnapped. He sent a lot of bribes to the people of Al Qaim, and he spread fear and horror within the population. I sent him a message, "You're claiming that you'll prevent the people from breathing and drinking water. I will cut off your head so everybody will be relieved of you." We fought together with the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade against Al Qaeda. He was the first one to be killed.

Knarr: When was that?

Ismael: Either October or November 2006. I have pictures of him when he died and how he was killed. Unfortunately, the photos are on my laptop back in Baghdad. Also, his deputy from Libya and 11 members of his cell were arrested. We captured great amount of weapons, cash, munitions, different kinds of rocket launchers, medium machine guns, all kinds of weapons we gained through that battle that I led myself from the headquarters with the help of the Marines. Colonel Lampadine was with me. [1:42:59]

Now the whole region is secured and everyone can move in the region. Especially me, I can move safely within the AO with my family, and I can go back and forth to my house

in Al Qaim. And I am really pleased to see Colonel Alford once again, because we have a lot of memories together.

Alford: I worked with the Ubaydi tribe and the Albu-Mahal tribe. I'm really looking forward to seeing Sheikh Kurdi and the whole area and how much it's developed. I tore up too much stuff. I'm looking forward to seeing it rebuilt.

Ismael: Most of it has been reestablished, and thanks once again, they built a lot of schools and hospitals in the area.

Alford: Is the train running?

Ismael: It's working.



5 November 2010

Subject: Interview with Major Mukhlis Shadhan Ibrahim al-Mahalawi

Major Mukhlis Shadhan Ibrahim al-Mahalawi commanded the 89-member unit of the Desert Protectors that was taken to Habbaniyah to be trained by the Special Forces. The unit then joined 3/6 Marines in mid-November 2005 during Operation STEEL CURTAIN and worked as reconnaissance teams for the Marine units engaged in the fight. When the unit was integrated into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of the 7<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army as part of the total force under the Command of Colonel Ahmed as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 7<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division, Major Mukhlis became the S-2 Intelligence officer for the Brigade.



**MAJ Mukhlis, Desert Protector**

Major Mukhlis was interviewed at the Mayor's office in Husaybah on 18 April 2010 by Dr. William (Bill) Knarr, Colonel Dale Alford, USMC, and Lieutenant Colonel David Graves, USMC. The following is his account of the Awakening. An interpreter was used during the interview.

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Dr. Bill Knarr: Please provide your background. Were you born in Al Qaim, and did you grow up here?

Major Mukhlis: Yes, I was born in 1973 in Al Qaim, and grew up in Al Qaim. I graduated from the Iraqi Military Academy in 1994, and I served all over Iraq in the old Iraqi Army. After Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in '03 started, I quit the Iraqi Army. After that, in '05, we saw the terrorists killing innocent people, cutting off heads, killing sheikhs, doctors, engineers, and even pilots. We started a small revolution. In '05, the Iraqi Government was very much a racist government, because we were ruled by Al Jaafari. So in '05, when we wanted to go and join the Iraqi Army, some of us were killed and sent to jail, because we were Sunnis. They didn't want us to play a big role in the new Iraqi Army.

Knarr: You said '05—was it the beginning of '05? And who are "they"?

Mukhlis: That was at the end of '05. We wanted to apply to the Iraqi Army, but we were rejected. That's why we started [organizing ourselves]. We gathered all the honest and brave people—278 individuals—and we became the Desert Protection Force.

Knarr: But something happened before that. The Desert Protectors had a fight with Al Qaeda. Were you a part of that fight in May of 2005?

Mukhlis: Yes, and we were free men and leaders for the 278 guys. It started with Colonel Ahmad, Major Jaman, and me. We were the three main professional leaders, because we graduated from the Military Academy.

Knarr: So then you kicked Al Qaeda out in May of 2005, but then in August, Al Qaeda came back? Were you in Al Qaim? Did you fight them when they came back?

Mukhlis: Yes. May 2 2005, we joined a battle against the terrorists, and we kicked them out of the Al Qaim area. We fought for 11 days and pushed Al Qaeda back to the Karabilah area. Coalition forces struck the Karabilah area and killed a lot of terrorists. There were some rumors that Zarqawi was injured in that strike. It may not be accurate information, but there was a really strong rumor that he was injured during that strike. Three months later, the 28<sup>th</sup> of July or the beginning of August, Zarqawi was determined to take Al Qaim from those who had fought against him. He would do whatever it took. That's why he started another battle after three months against the honest people who fought Al Qaeda the first time. [6:30]

Knarr: Now you say after three months. So what happened during those three months and what happened after 28 July?

Mukhlis: After the second battle began, we were 68 individuals fighting the terrorists. We were supporting each other like one who has a lot of money helps another who doesn't have any money. Once the ammo was gone, we couldn't fight the terrorists. We withdrew from the city and went to Akashat.

After that, Colonel Ahmad went to Baghdad and met with the Minister of Defense. The Minister of Defense asked for those who had fought the terrorists to join the Iraqi Army. Then when we came back here, we were trying to establish a small force to protect the Akashat area. We called ourselves the Desert Protection Force. The only one who helped was Mr. Sa'dun Dulaymi. He kept insisting that he wanted to help and support this force. There were a lot of objections from other members of the government, but he insisted that he wanted to support the Desert Protection Force.

After that we took a small group to Habbaniyah where we were trained on weapons, street fighting, and all that stuff. That training was lead by Captain Joe. After that, we came back here. Then we joined Operation STEEL CURTAIN.

This was one of the most successful operations, because it was a joint operation between the locals and the Coalition forces. The Coalition forces were fighting the terrorists blindly; they didn't have accurate information, so that's when the local people gave them accurate information. They had the most powerful sources in the cities, so they were very organized. That's why the STEEL CURTAIN Operation was the most successful operation. [9:39]

Knarr: Were you the commander of the Desert Protector Force when you participated in STEEL CURTAIN?

Mukhlis: Yes, I was the commander when we did STEEL CURTAIN.

Knarr: What did you call your unit?

Mukhlis: The Desert Protection Force is the main name for it. That's why we had an excellent reputation. Everybody was asking, "Who's this small group that joined Operation STEEL CURTAIN? They did a great job." We kept the Desert Protection Force name because it had a very good reputation among all the tribes.

Knarr: How many people did you have when you went to STEEL CURTAIN?

Mukhlis: Eighty nine.

Knarr: And they were all trained by the Special Forces?

Mukhlis: Yes. They were trained by the Special Forces. Special Forces played a big role in training them and raising their spirits. They were very brave men who fought the terrorists.

Knarr: Did you have Special Forces Advisors when you went to STEEL CURTAIN?

Mukhlis: Yes, they were good men. They were supervising the group. There is a certain man, Sergeant Paul. He was one of the best of the best.

Knarr: That was his first name?

Mukhlis: Yes, he was one of the best who trained us, and he kept supervising us.

Knarr: What was the mission of your unit during STEEL CURTAIN?

Mukhlis: It was divided into four stages. During the first stage we gathered a lot of intelligence like where the terrorists were staging, where their operations center was, where did they plant IEDs. That was the first step; we obtained a lot of intelligence about the terrorists. The Coalition forces had a hard time finding the terrorists before STEEL CURTAIN. Because of this, we asked the Marines [if we could] be on the front lines and find the terrorists and

be the first people to fight the terrorists. The Marines refused that; they wanted to operate side by side with the Desert Protection Force. So this was the second stage. We were one of the first groups that fought the terrorists in STEEL CURTAIN. [17:34]

Knarr: Ok, let me see if I can repeat this. You wanted to go in first against the terrorists, but the Marines said, no. They fought side by side with you? Is that right?

Mukhlis: Yes. Our third duty was to [identify those who were captured]. We were the only ones who could identify people captured by the US Forces. Somebody could be a prince or an emir [among the bad guys], and somebody might be his assistant and so on. There are a lot of Arabs and because we live in this area, we are much more familiar with all faces—we knew who was the prince, the emir, and who were his assistants. It was our job to identify them. [20:17]

Knarr: So when the battle started and you fought with the Marines, can you tell me a little about the battle?

Mukhlis: Like what Sir? What type of information?

Knarr: Well, you fought with the Marines and you had 89 people. Did you fight with all 89 together in the same locations or did you split them up so that the Marines had support for each of their elements? One of your missions was to identify people; were the Desert Protectors split up so they could perform that function better?

Mukhlis: We were organized like the Marines at that time. They had a couple of squads, so there were two or three men from the Desert Protection Force with each squad to lead and guide them. We knew the area, so we were leading them and guiding them through the battle. That's why I divided all my men among the squads to lead them and help them. [22:20]

Knarr: Okay, IRON FIST went up to Karabilah and then STEEL CURTAIN picked up and swept the rest. No, in fact, you went from west to east. You already had to cross, so you were trying to catch him [Zarqawi?] in the Wadi weren't you [talking to Colonel Alford]?

Alford: And then we went up into Ubaydi.

Knarr: [Talking to Major Mukhlis] Did you go to Ubaydi then?

Mukhlis: Yes, STEEL CURTAIN took 28 days. It was 14 days down south of the river, and 14 days north of the river at the Al Babose [unintelligible] area. So 14 days from here to



Ubaydi. Then after that from Ubaydi, we took the position north of the river, and we fought another 14 days until we reached Al Babose [unintelligible] and the border area.

Alford: The fighting there wasn't nearly as intense north of the river, but we did too...I think that was my LAR and two platoons.

Mukhlis: So it took us two steps [first, south of the river and second, north of the river].



**Figure B-1. Desert Protectors Celebrate after Operation STEEL CURTAIN**

Knarr: After STEEL CURTAIN, what did your unit do?

Mukhlis: After that we focused on intelligence gathering. That's why the US forces didn't have to do large operations to collect on targets. We collected all the information about the targets and conducted selective targeting and selective operations against special individuals.

Knarr: So you were still working for the Special Forces to do those things?

Mukhlis: As the Desert Protection Force, the Marines played a big role helping and supporting us: financially, in spirit, everything. That's what the Marines gave to us, and the Desert Protection Forces succeeded. That's why a big favor goes to the Marines for our own security.

The main seed for the Awakening—for the Sahawa—is those people who fought with the Desert Protection Force. We appreciated fighting with the US forces against the terrorists without having to hide our faces. The Marines were really afraid for the lives of those in the Desert Protection Force, because they really appreciated them. This is the real beginning of the Awakening. After all the people and all the tribe leaders saw the success that came from the Desert Protection Force, it moved everyone to gain courage and to volunteer for the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police. That shows we really did a great thing. After that, we expanded the whole operation and we went to Anah and Rawah, and it became bigger and bigger. (29:30)

Knarr: So you stayed as a separate force under the advisors from the Special Forces until when? How long did you lead the 89-person unit?

Mukhlis: We kept working with the Special Forces until the middle of 2006.

Knarr: Okay. Then what happened?

Mukhlis: After that, they let us join the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade from the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. I became the intelligence officer of the brigade. That was at the beginning of the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade. We did a lot for the 28<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Also, with support from the Marines, we helped obtain information about Al Qaeda, including how they got their money, how they were supplied, and where they were located. That was really what my main job was then, to gather intelligence on Al Qaeda.

Knarr: Was your commander General Ismael?

Mukhlis: Yes.

Alford: The Desert Protectors were a huge part of the success of STEEL CURTAIN.

Mukhlis: We are so proud of what we did here. I am sure that after 20–30 years, our sons are going to be so proud. People talk about the Awakening in Ramadi by Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha. But the people who joined Operation STEEL CURTAIN should be the first people named as the Awakening guys, because it's one year before Sheik Ahmed Abu Risha started his Awakening group.

Mukhlis: Yes, and we are the first people who start the Awakening. [36:27] After that a big conspiracy started. I have friends back home, back in Jordan, and my friend told me that because we did a great job—we, Colonel Ahmed and General Ismael—there was a rumor that we were going to be transferred. So within a couple of weeks, I transferred to Mosul, and Colonel Ahmed was transferred to a different area. Colonel Ismael was also transferred to a different area. Ramadi and Baghdad and the other districts all over Iraq were still under terrorist control. Everybody knew there was a conspiracy from really high up to move us. That's why I quit....Yes, no one knows if it was political or if the conspiracy came from Al Qaeda. [37:33]

Knarr: I am in awe of what you, Colonel Ahmed, the Albu-Mahals, and Mayor Farhan have done here.

Mayor Farhan: The history of course is not going to lie to you later on, so that's why I am telling you the truth. Colonel Ahmad and everyone, they told the truth. We have an old saying that "The sun rises from the west." Everybody knows the truth and the whole truth comes from here.

## Appendix C. Who's Who

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### Interviewees

**Abd al-Hakim Muhammad Rashid Muhammad al-Jughayfi**, Mayor of Hadithah

**Abdul Qadir Mohammed Jassim Obeidi al-Mifarji**, General, Minister of Defense from 2006 to present, preceded by Dr. Sadun al-Dulaymi, Sunni Arab, born in Ramadi

**Abdullah Jallal Mukhlif al-Faraji**, Head of Sunni Endowment for Anbar Province, Regent Sheikh of the Albu-Faraj tribe; Ramadi City Council Member

**Adel**, Brigadier General, Commander 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Division

**Ahmad Jelayan Khalaf**, former Desert Protector

**Ahmed Bezia Fteikhan al-Rishawi**, Paramount Sheikh of the Albu-Risha tribe, President of Muttamar Sahawat al-Iraq (MSI)

**Ahmed Hamid Sharqi**, Colonel, Chief, North Ramadi Police Precinct

**Aum Ahmed**, resident of Al Qaim

**Babakir Badr-khan Shawat al-Zubari**, General, Chief of Staff for the Joint Forces Command, Studied at the Iraqi Military Academy in Baghdad in 1969, served in the Kurdish Peshmerga 1973–91; Escaped to Iran as a political refugee in 1975; Acting Commanding General of Iraqi Joint Headquarters, 2004–05; Chief of Staff, Iraqi Joint Headquarters, 2005 to present

**Bakhit Arak Ali**, Lieutenant Colonel, Commander, Qatana Police Station, Ramadi

**Bezi Mujjil Nijris al-Gaoud al-Nimrawi**, eldest Sheikh of the Albu-Nimr tribe; one of the first tribal leaders to offer to arm tribesmen and support Coalition (Summer 2003); turned down by CPA over concerns of creating tribal militias; lives in Amman, Jordan

**Farouq Tareh Harden al-Jughayfi**, Colonel, Police Chief Hadithah

**Hareth al-Dhari**, (Dr.) Leader of the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) and Zobai tribe

**Ibrahim al-Jaafari**, former Iraqi Prime Minister, April 2005 to May 2006

**Ismael Sha Hamid Dulaymi**, staff Brigadier General Former Commander 28<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Brigade, 7<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division

**Jalal al-Gaoud**, Iraqi Businessman from Hit, residing in Jordan

**Jassim Muhammad Salih al-Suwaydawi**, sheikh of the Albu-Souda tribe

**Kurdi Rafee Farhan Al-Mahalawi**, lower tier sheikh of Albu-Mahal tribe

**Mahmood al-Janabi**, a leader with the Jaish al-Islami (Islamic Army) insurgent group

**Majed Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman**, Sheikh of the Dulaymi Confederation

**Mamoun Sami Rashid Latif al-Alwani**, former Governor of Anbar; Anbar Provincial Council Member; Chairman of the Provincial Council's Economic Committee

**Mishan Abbas Muhammad al-Jumayli**, Paramount Sheikh of the Albu-Jumayli tribe

**Mohammed Al-Saady**, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister and Chairman of the Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation. Recently elected to the new Parliament.

**Mukhlis Shadhan Ibrahim al-Mahalawi**, Desert Protectors commander

**Nathem al-Jabouri**, former member of AQI

**Numan al-Gaoud**, businessman and member of the Albu-Nimr tribe in Hit

**Raad Majid Rashid al-Hamdani**, Lieutenant General, Retired Republican Guard Commander; Leader of the FRE Movement to Reintegrate with GOI

**Raja Farhan**, mayor of Al Qaim

**Sa'fa Al-Sheikh**, National Security Advisor

**Sa'id al-Jughayfi**, Sheikh of the Jughayfi tribe in Hadithah

**Sabah al-Sattam Effan Fahren al-Shurji al-Aziz**, principal Sheik of the Albu-Mahal tribe in Al Qaim

**Sadun Juwayr Farhan al-Rishawi al-Dulaymi**, Doctor, Former Minister of Defense 2005/2006, Doctorate in Social Psychology from United Kingdom's Keele University

**Said Flayyah Othman al-Jughayfi**, contesting Sheikh, Albu-Jughayfi, one of the top 17 influential tribes in Anbar, Hadithah

**Sha'ban Barzan Himrin**, Colonel, former Chief of Police in Baghdadi

**Sheikh Ali Hatim Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman al-Assafi al-Dulaymi**, President of the Common Council of Iraqi and Arab Sheikhs, Lineal Sheikh-in-waiting of the Albu-Assaf tribe, Founder of the Iraqi National Front

**Tariq al-Abdullah al-Halbusi**, Principle Sheik of the Halbusi tribe located in Fallujah

**Thamer Kadhemi al Tamimi**, closely associated with JAI; one of the first and premier Sahawa leaders in Baghdad

**Thamir Ibrahim Tahir al-Assafi**, Doctor, Head of the Muslim Ulema Council (MUC) for Anbar and Senior Theologian to Sunni Waqf; Ramadi City Council member; Al-Anbar University (AAU) Professor of Religious Studies; Mutammar Sahawat al-Iraq (MSI) office of Religious Affairs

**Thary Abed Alhadi al-Yousef al-Zobi**, Deputy Governor, on the Awakening

### **Other Notable People**

**Abdul Sattar Albu-Risha**, Leader of the Awakening movement in the Al Anbar Area, assassinated 13 September 2007

**Abdullah al-Janabi**, close supporter, organizer, and religious advisor to many of the insurgent groups growing in and around Fallujah during the summer of 2003; became one of the key influential insurgent leaders during both battles of Fallujah (2004)

**Abu Ayyub al-Masri**, replaced Zarqawi as leader of AQI following the former's death in June 2006; created Islamic State of Iraq in October 2006

**Abu Musab al-Zarqawi**, Jordanian-born founder of *Jama'at Al-Tawhid Wa'al Jihad* (JTJ – Group of Monotheism and Holy War) (2003) and later Al-Qaeda in Iraq (October 2004); killed in Coalition airstrike in June 2006

**Amer Abd al-Jabbar Ali Sulayman al-Assafi al-Dulaymi**, Co-Paramount Sheikh of the Albu-Assaf tribe and Co-Sheikh General of the Dulaymi Confederation

**Faisal al-Gaoud**, former Sheikh of Albu-Nimr; father of Sheikh Fasal

**Fasal Rakan Nejris**, Sheikh of Albu-Nimr tribe; appointed governor of Anbar by IIG November 2004; replaced as governor by Raja Nawaf Farhan al-Mahalawi (May 2005); Awakening Council leader; died 25 June 2007 in Mansour Hotel bombing

**Hamid Farhan al-Heiss**, from the Albu-Thiyab tribe; member of the Anbar Salvation Council; don't confuse him with his brother, Sheikh Muhammad Farhan al-Heiss and contesting lineal sheikh of the Albu-Thiyab tribe

**Hatim Razzaq**, current Sheikh of Albu-Nimr

**Hikmat Jubayir**, mayor of Hit; Sheikh of Albu-Nimr tribe

**Karim Burjis al-Rawi**, former governor of Anbar Province (April 2003–August 2004); forced to resign after his sons were kidnapped; replaced by Mohammad Awad

**Khalid al Irak al-Jassim**, leader of the Albu-Ali Jassim tribe, killed by AQI

**Khalid Araq Ataymi al-Iliyawi**, well respected Ali Jassim tribal leader brutally murdered by AQI (August 2006); his body was hidden preventing burial for three days, violating both tribal and Islamic custom; catalyst for tribal resistance to AQI in the Ramadi area

**Lawrence Mutib Mahruth al-Hathal al-Aniza**, Paramount Sheikh of the Albu-Aniza tribe, Mayor of Nukhayb, Anbar, Iraq

**Mudhir Abdul Karim Thiab al-Kharbit**, son of Sheikh Malik; assumed leadership of clan upon his father's death; Ba'athist supporter and strongly anti-Coalition following his father's death

**Muhammad Mahmoud Latif**, leader of the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades and Ramadi Shura council

**Muqtada al-Sadr**, Shia cleric and leader of the Mahdi Militia

**Naim Abd al-Muhsin al-Gaoud**, appointed by Coalition forces as first mayor of Hit (April 2004)

**Nayil al-Jughayfi**, seized control of Hadithah during initial invasion; subsequently recognized by Coalition as first mayor (April 2004)

**Raja Nawaf Farhan al-Mahalawi**, appointed governor of Anbar by newly-elected provincial council (May 2005); kidnapped by extremist elements to influence Albu-Mahal to stop fighting AQI; found dead in a home after Coalition-insurgent fighting in the area; replaced by Mamoun Sami Rasheed

**Razak Salim Hamza**, former commander 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Division

**Sheikh Malik al-Kharbit**, tribal leader of the Khalifawi (Ramadi area); head of one of the most important families in the powerful Dulaymi tribal federation; cooperated with Coalition forces before the invasion; tragically killed along with between 17 and 22 family members, including women and children during mistaken Coalition airstrike on his compound (11 April 2004); cited as motivating factor turning Ramadi-area tribes against Coalition

**Talal al-Gaoud**, son of Bezi al-Gaoud; worked with Marines engagements in Jordan in 2004; died suddenly in 2006

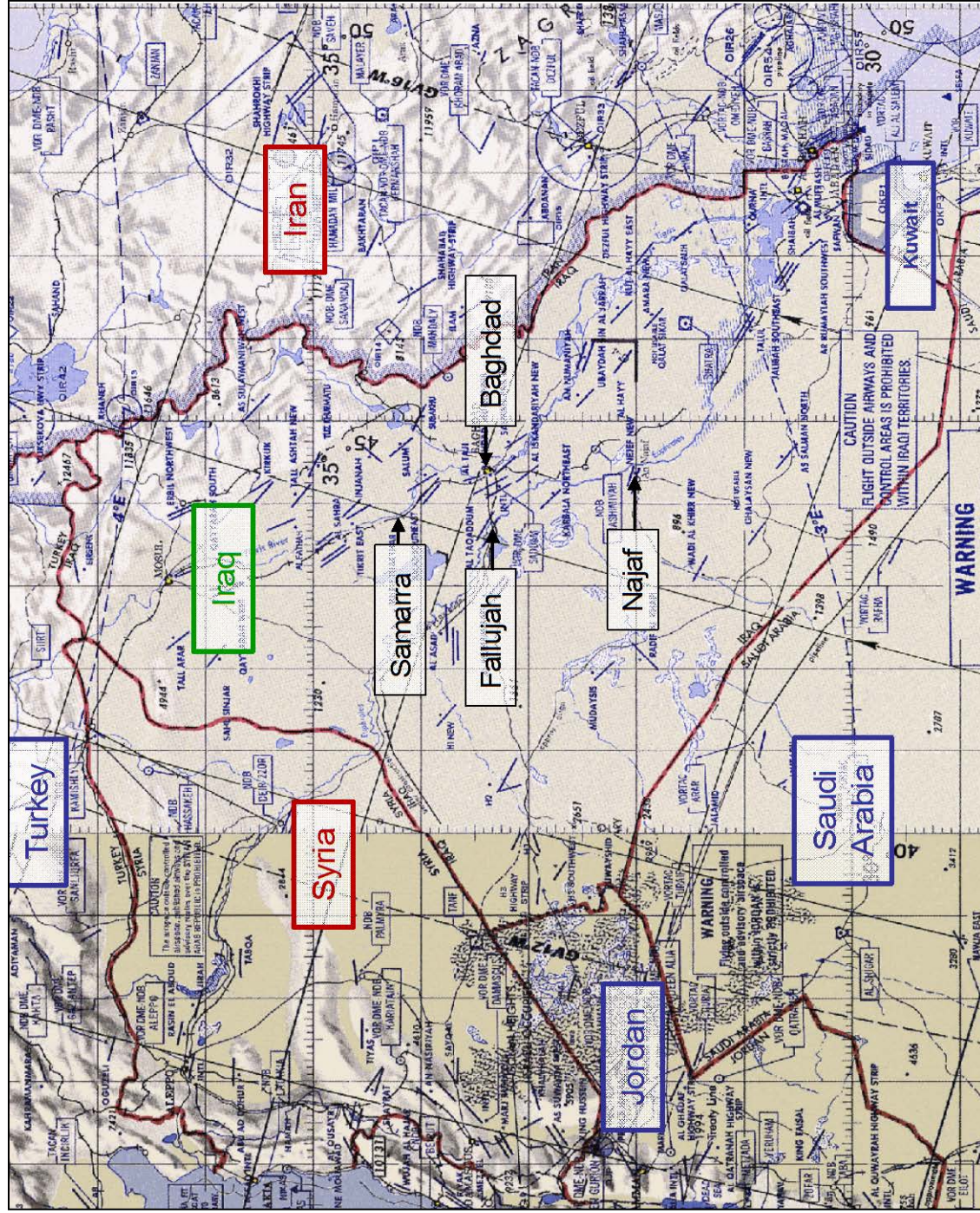
**Tariq Abdul Wahab Jasim**, former Commander Iraqi First Division

## **Appendix D. Maps**

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Note: North is towards the top of all maps as you read them.

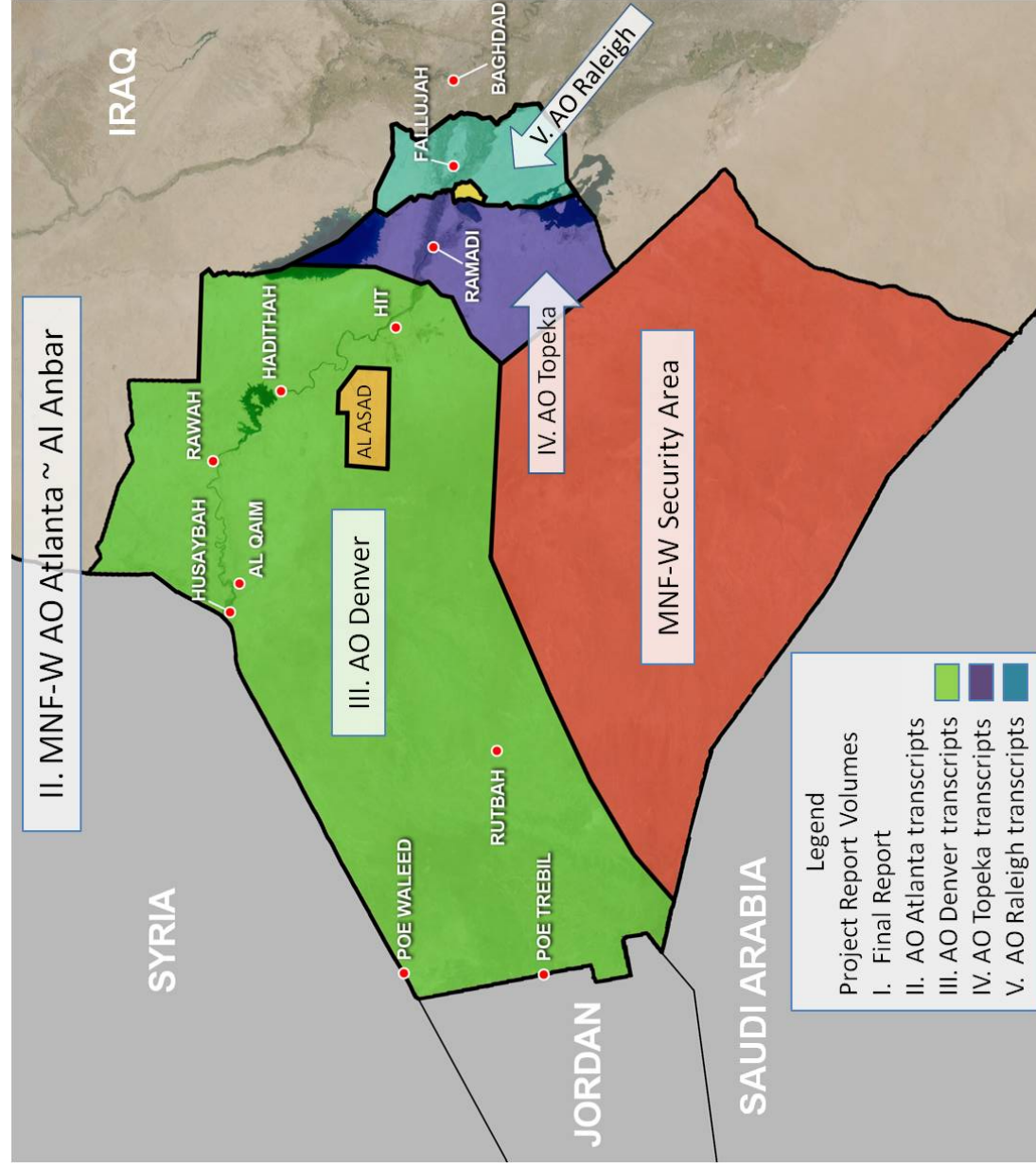




Base map courtesy of National Geospatial Agency

Figure E-1. Map of Iraq and its Neighbors





Area of Operation boundaries extracted from map courtesy of I-MEF and USMC History Division

**Figure E-2. Map of Military Operational Areas in Iraq during 2004**

1. 2003: From Victory to Chaos – Sowing the Seeds of an Insurgency
2. 2004: The Year Starts and Ends Headlining Fallujah

#### Western Euphrates River Valley – WERV

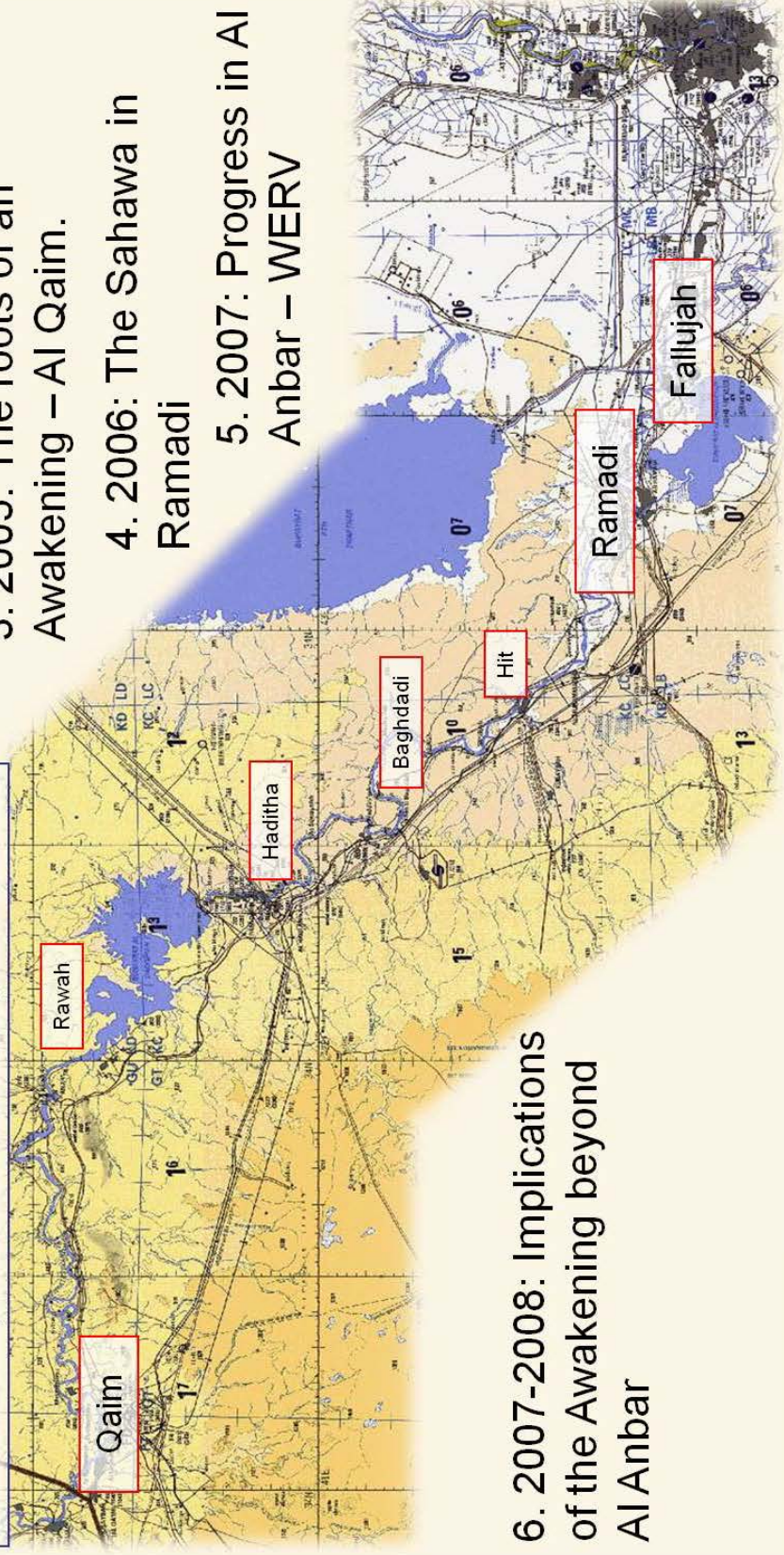
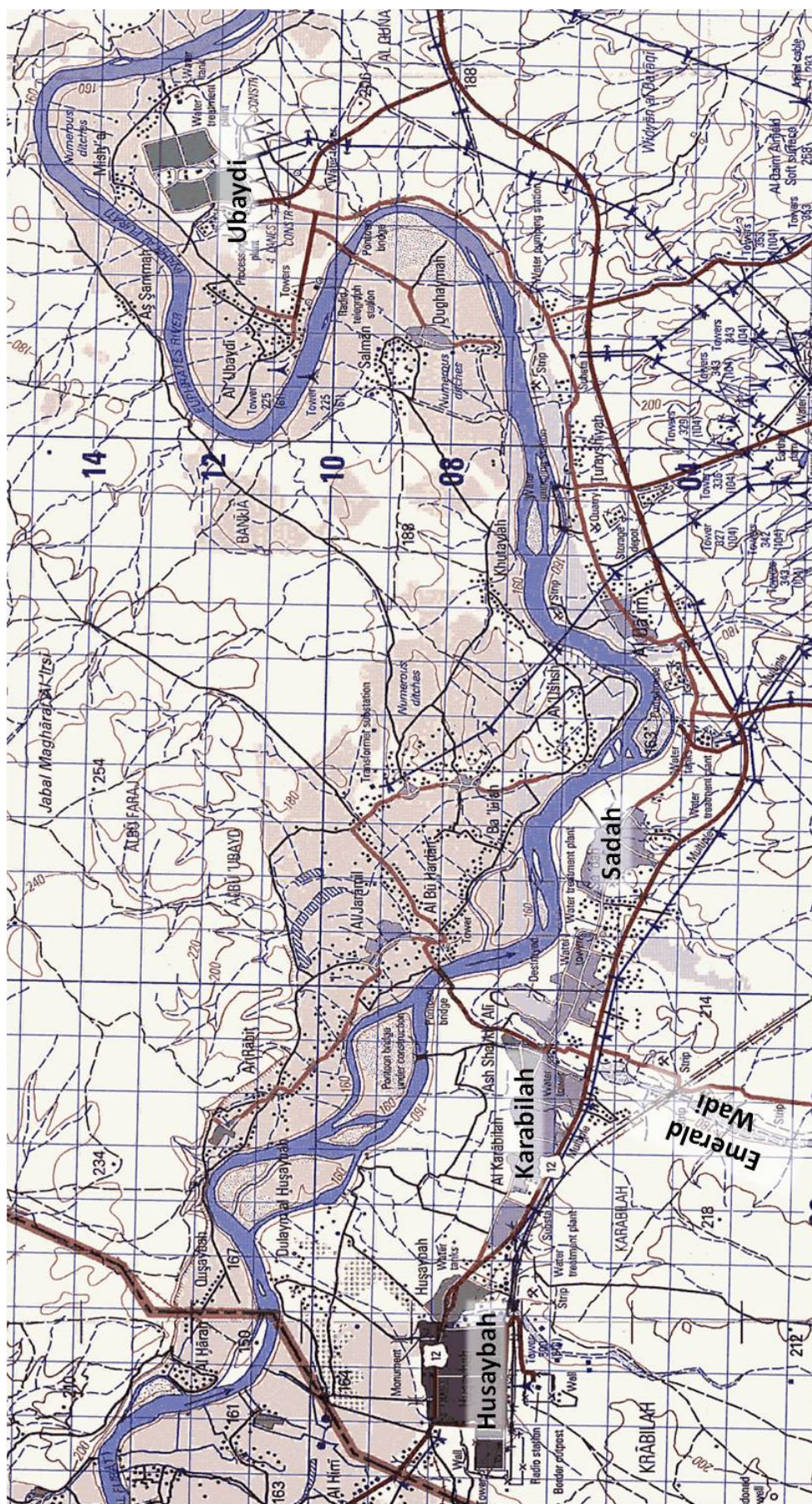


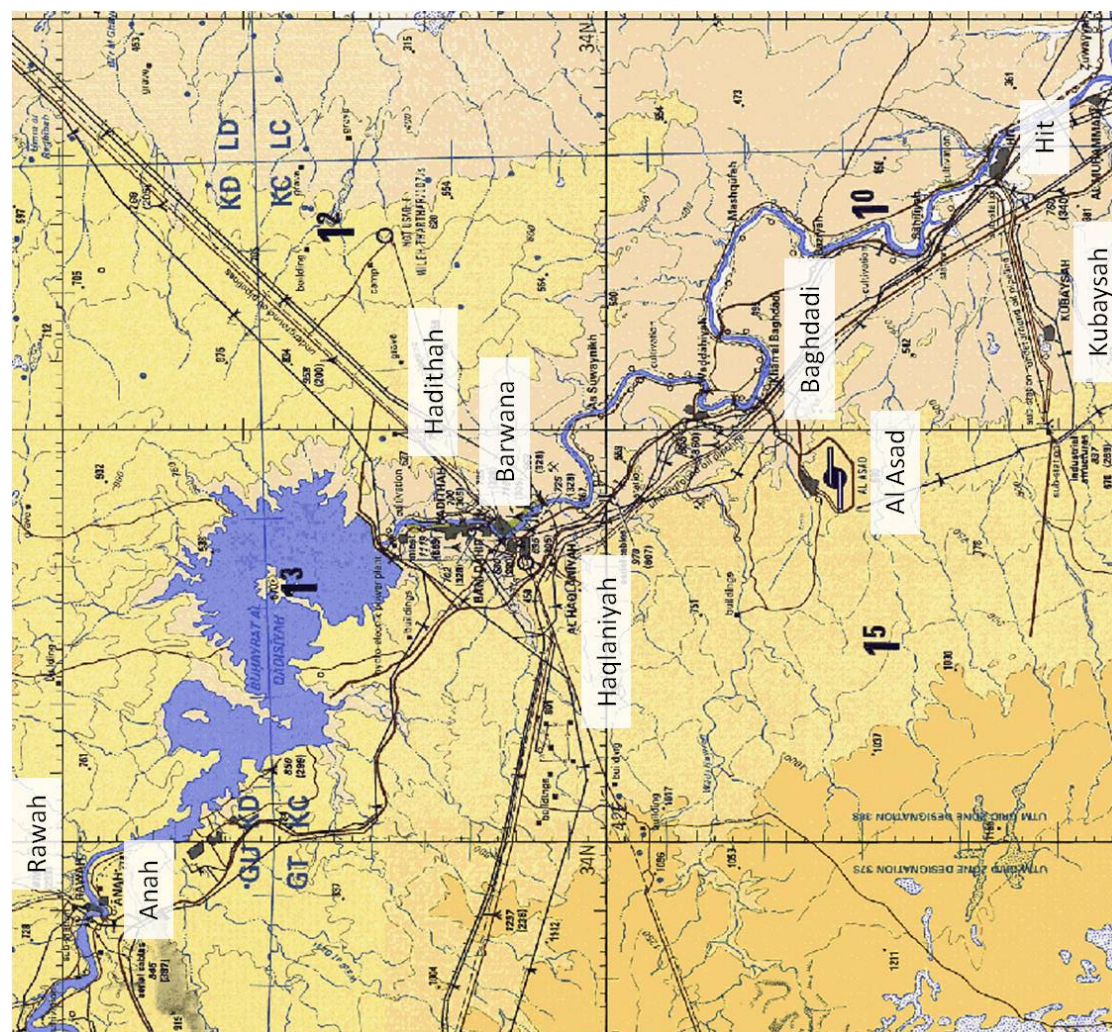
Figure E-3. Phases of the Al Anbar Awakening





**Figure E-4. Map of Al Qaim Area**





**Figure E-5. Map of the Hadithah Area**



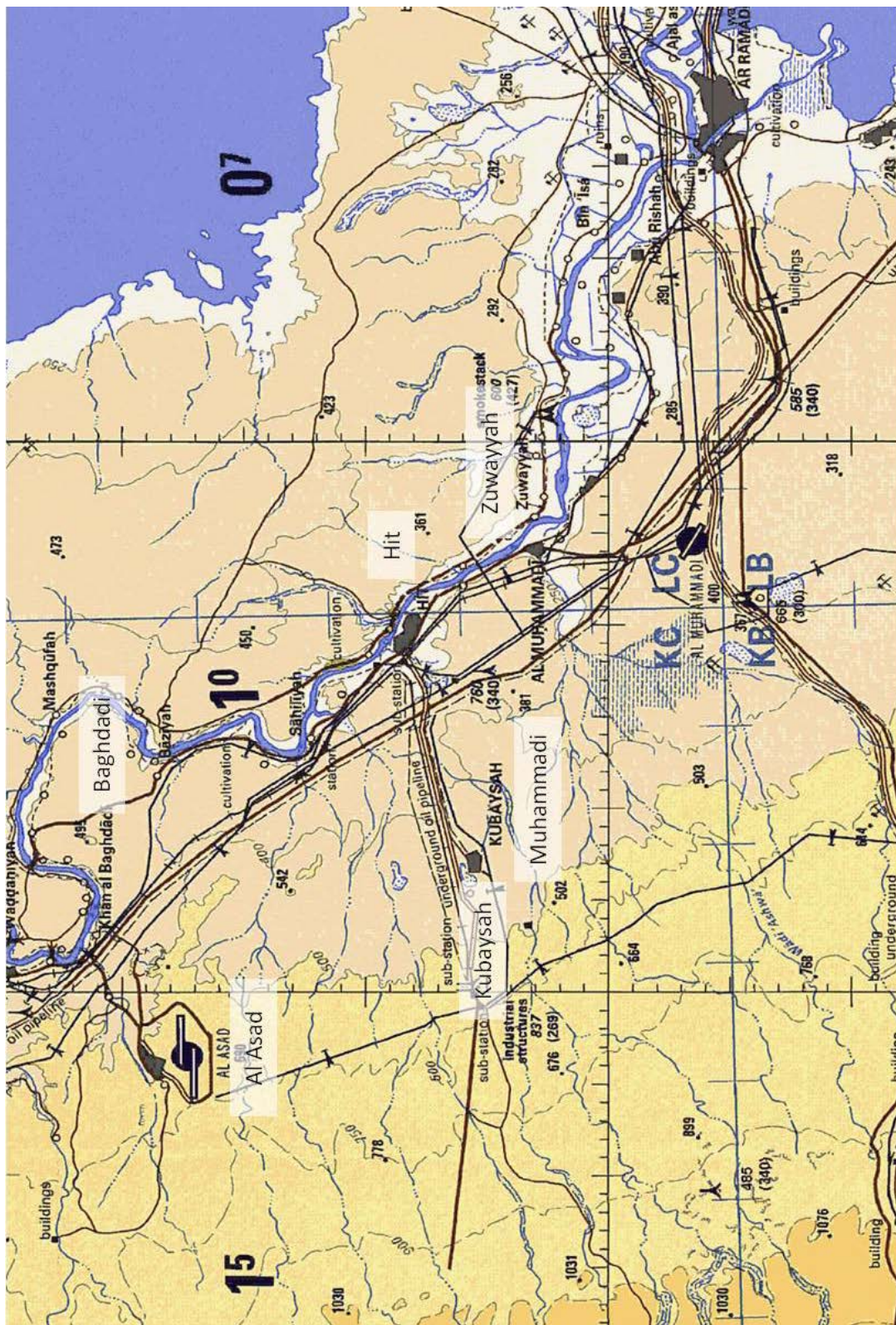
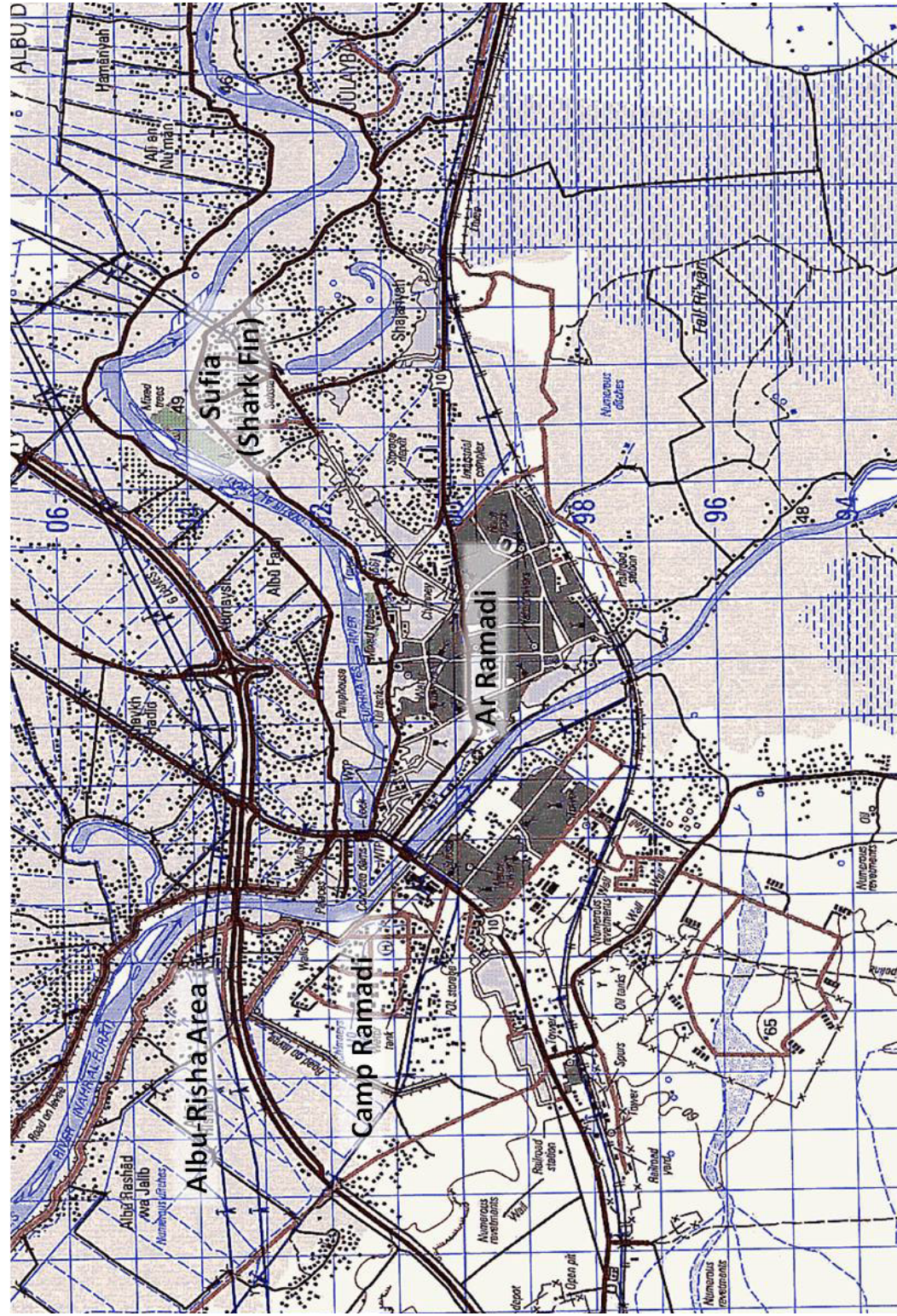


Figure E-6. Map of the Al Asad/Hit Area





**Figure E-7. Map of the Ramadi Area**



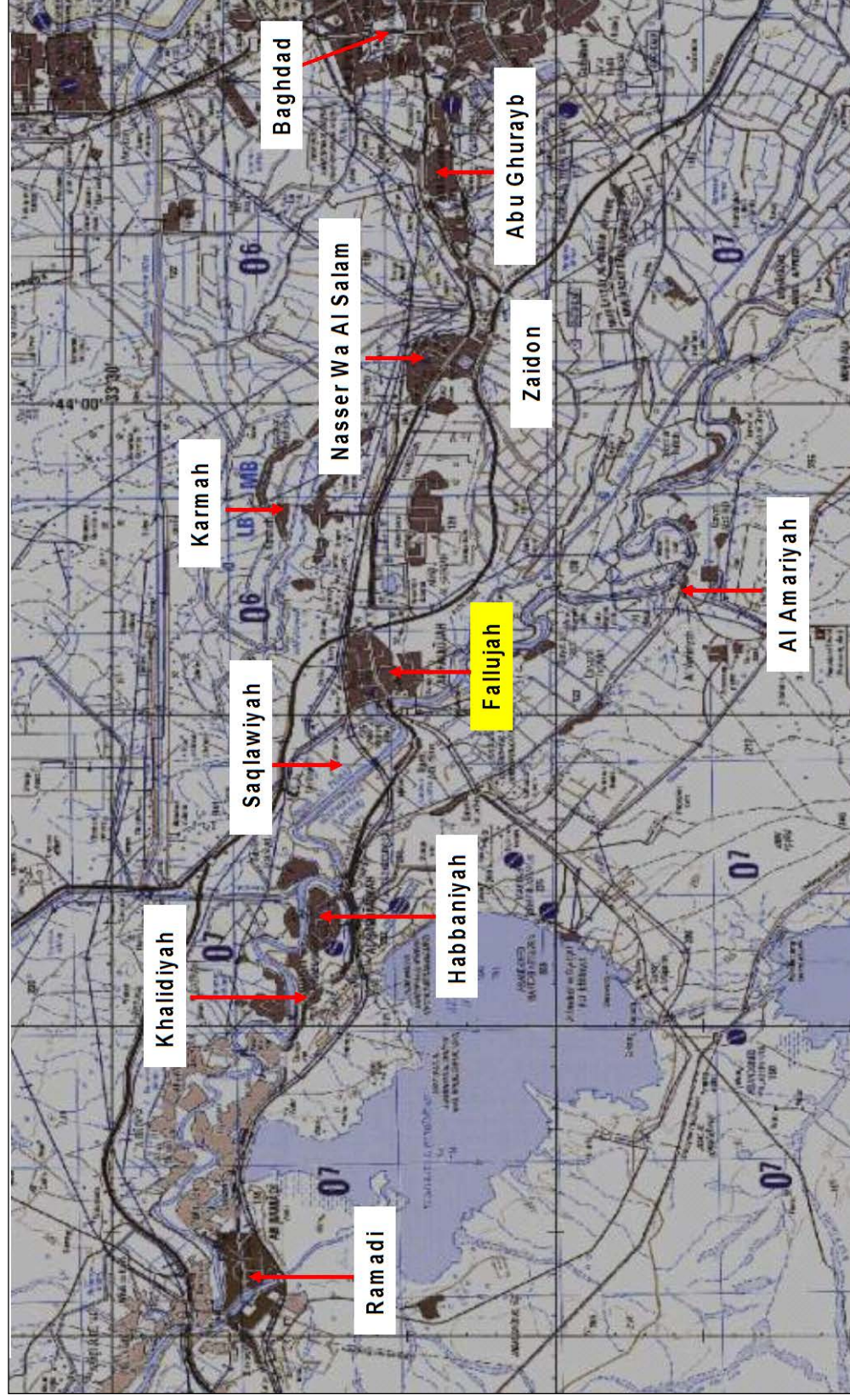


Image courtesy of 1st MARDIV

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## Appendix G. Abbreviations

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ACR	Armored Calvary Regiment
AID	Agency for International Development
AO	Area of Operation
AQI	Al Qaeda in Iraq
AST	Advisory Support Team
AWOL	absent without leave
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
BLT	Battalion Landing Team
Brig Gen	Brigadier General–US Air Force
BGen	Brigadier General–US Marine Corps
BG	Brigadier General–US Army
C2	command and control
CA	Civil Affairs
CAG	civil affairs group
Capt	Captain, US Marine Corps or US Air Force
Cav	cavalry
CE	Command Element
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CERP	Commander Emergency Response Program
CFLCC	Coalition Forces Land Component Command
CG	Commanding General
C&GS	Command and General Staff
CI	counterintelligence
CIR	Critical Information Requirement
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
CLC	Concerned Local Citizens
CLIC	company level intelligence cell
CMATT	Coalition Military Assistance Training Teams
CMO	Civil-Military Operations
CO	commanding officer
COC	combat operations center

COL	Colonel, US Army
Col	Colonel, US Marine Corps or US Air Force
CONUS	Continental United States
COP	Combat Outpost
COR	Council of Representative
CP	command post
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CPATT	Civilian Police Assistance Training Teams
CT	counterterrorism
DHS	Defense HUMINT Service
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
ECP	entry control point
FB	Fallujah Brigade
FMF	Fleet Marine Force
FM	field manual
FOB	Forward Operating Base
FRAGO	Fragmentary Order
G-3	Army or Marine Corps component operation staff officer (Army division or higher staff, Marine Corps brigade or higher staff)
GEN	General, US Army
Gen	General, US Marine Corps or US Air Force
GOI	Government of Iraq
HACC	Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center
HIIDE	handheld interagency identification detection equipment
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
HOC	Humanitarian Operations Center
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
IA	Iraqi Army
ICDC	Iraqi Civil Defense Corps
IDA	Institute for Defense Analyses
IED	improvised explosive device
IG	Iraqi Government
IGC	Iraqi Governing Council
IIF	Iraqi Intervention Forces
IIG	Iraqi Interim Government

IIP	Iraqi Islamic Party
IMA	Individual Mobilization Augmentee
ING	Iraqi National Guard
IO	information operations
IR	Information Requirement
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ITG	Iraqi Transition Government
JAI	Jaish al-Islami [Islamic Army]
JAWP	Joint Advance Warfighting Program
JCOA	Joint Center for Operational Analysis
JFCOM	United States Joint Forces Command
JIC	Joint Intelligence Center
KIA	Killed in Action
LAR	Light Armored Reconnaissance
LNO	liaison officer
LOO	Lines of Operation
LtGen	Lieutenant General, US Marine Corps
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel, US Army
LT Col	Lieutenant Colonel, US Air Force
LtCol	Lieutenant Colonel, US Marine Corps
LTG	Lieutenant General, US Army
MAJ	Major, US Army
Maj	Major, US Marine Corps or US Air Force
MajGen	Major General, US Marine Corps
MARDIV	Marine Division
ME	main effort
MedEvac	medical evacuation
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Force
MG	Major General, US Army
MiTT	Military Transition Team
MNC-I	Multi-National Corps–Iraq
MND	Multi-National Division

MND-CS	Multi-National Division–Central South
MNF-I	Multi-National Forces–Iraq
MNF-W	Multi-National Forces-West
MNSTC-I	Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MSR	main supply route
MTOE	Modified Table of Organization and Equipment
NCO	non-commissioned officer
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSC	National Security Council
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
OGA	Other Governmental Agencies
OIF	Operation IRAQI FREEDOM
OODA	observe, orient, decide, act
OP	operations order
OVR	OPERATION VIGILANT RESOLVE
PAI	Personnel Asset Inventory
PLST	Provincial Liaison Support Team
POC	point of contact
POO	point of origin
RADM	Rear Admiral, US Navy
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
ROE	rules of engagement
RPG	rocket propelled grenade
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
PsyOps	Psychological Operations
S-3	battalion or brigade operations staff officer (Army; Marine Corps bat- talion or regiment)
SAW	School of Advanced Warfighting (USMC)
SE	secondary effort
SEAL	Sea, Air, Land Team
SFG	Special Forces Group
SFODA	Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha

SIGACT	Significant Activity Report
SIPR	Secure Internet Protocol Router
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOI	Sons of Iraq
SOTF	Special Operations Task Force
TO	Table of Organization
TOA	Transfer of Authority
TOC	tactical operations center
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command (US Army)
UA	unauthorized absence
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicles
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USF	United States Forces
VBIED	vehicle-borne improvised explosive device
VTC	video teleconference
WERV	Western Euphrates River Valley
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
XO	Executive Officer



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